

HELEN CAREY

SOMEWHERE IN AMERICA



MARTHA TRENT



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HELEN CAREY
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“He kicked and ran and stopped suddenly, but Missy was ready for him and stayed in the saddle”
(Page 140) *Frontispiece*

HELEN CAREY

SOMEWHERE IN AMERICA

A WAR TIME STORY

BY

MARTHA TRENT

ILLUSTRATED BY

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I MISSY RIDES FOR THE MAIL	11
II A PIEBALD PONY AND A BLACKSNAKE WHIP .	19
III THE BELGIUM SOLDIER'S LETTER	29
IV THE TENDERFOOT ARRIVES	41
V A DISCOVERY BETWEEN DANCES	48
VI NOT SUCH A TENDERFOOT AFTER ALL	59
VII PREPARING FOR WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN . . .	71
VIII MISSY IS JUST IN TIME	80
IX THE HOLDUP	91
X MISSY RECEIVES CONGRATULATIONS	100
XI VOLUNTEERS	108
XII NED RETURNS	120
XIII THE PICNIC	129
XIV THE SURPRISE PARTY	145
XV TWO LETTERS	156
XVI ON THE TRAIN	166
XVII A RENEWED ACQUAINTANCE	179
XVIII THE WARNING	189
XIX THE RESCUE	200
XX MISSY MAKES A PROMISE	206
XXI CONCLUSION	215

ILLUSTRATIONS

“He kicked and ran and stopped suddenly, but Missy was ready for him and stayed in the saddle” . . .	<i>Frontispiece</i> ✓
	PAGE
“Hurry up, Missy. What’s he say?”	31 ✓
“She spurred Cappy to such a pace that conversation was impossible”	69 ✓
“‘Not to-day, Mr. Sheldon.’ And he found himself looking into the muzzle of Missy’s gun”	89 ✓
“He waved a welcoming hand and sat down on the fence to wait for her”	121 ✓

HELEN CAREY

CHAPTER I

MISSY RIDES FOR THE MAIL

“**I**’LL ride in for the mail, Chink.” Helen Carey spoke from the depths of a big wicker chair, and so startled the little Chinaman who stood in the doorway that he very nearly dropped the basket of vegetables he was carrying. He regained his composure almost at once, however, in true Oriental fashion, folded his small yellow hands complacently before him, and chanted in a high, sing-song voice:

“Missy go, ali-right, supper six ’clock, flap-jacks,” and shuffled out of the room.

Helen, or Missy, to use the name by which every one on the Carey ranch called her, got up from her chair, yawned, stretched and went out on the veranda.

Half girl, half boy, and the better half of each, is an adequate description of Missy. She was slim and straight, with broad shoulders, and a

well-shaped, little head. Her hair was dark brown, and she wore it brushed straight back from her forehead in a thick braid down her back. Her gray-blue eyes were clear and steady, with the slightest suggestion of a squint, and her mouth, small and delicate, turned up provokingly at the corners. There was an expression of courage and self-reliance in her whole manner that is not often found in a sixteen-year-old girl.

She jumped down from the porch, scorning to use the steps, and made for the corral at the side of the ranch building. A cowboy was just unsaddling a pony at the door of the main barn, whistling softly.

“Hello, Ned,” Missy called. “What are you doing back so soon?”

“What am I doing back? Ask Jinx,” the cowboy returned in an aggrieved voice, as he threw the saddle down in one corner of the barn.

The pony took a few steps toward the feed box, and Missy saw that he limped.

“Oh, a sprain! how did it happen?” she asked.

“I told you to ask Jinx,” Ned answered crossly. “I don’t know; I didn’t see a gopher hole, but he did, picked it out, and went and fell in it; he’s the most contrary—”

“Now, Ned, quit blaming Jinx; you weren’t

looking where you were going," Missy laughed. "Anyway, stop scolding him long enough to go and catch Cappy for me. I'll wait in the corral."

Ned ambled off up the lane, a comical figure in his broad sombrero and flapping chaps.

He singled Missy's pony Cappy from the other horses in the pasture and drove him into the corral. Missy slipped the halter over his head and saddled him.

"Where are you bound for?" Ned inquired as he helped her pull in the girth strap.

"Mail," Missy answered shortly. "Shut the gate for me, will you?"

She jumped into the saddle, arranged her riding skirt, and touched Cappy's flank with her spur, and horse and rider swung out of the corral.

Ned fastened the gate and went back, still grumbling, to Jinx. He always had a grievance about something, and the other cowboys delighted in making him the butt of their none too gentle humor.

Two big puffy clouds chased each other lazily across the blue sky as Missy passed the ranch house and headed Cappy over the plains that stretched out as far as the eye could see in low undulating hills.

Sage brush and an occasional clump of aspen trees broke the monotony. The earth was soft, and Cappy broke into a steady lope. Missy tightened the elastic of her sombrero under her chin and settled down comfortably into her Mexican saddle. It was a good three miles to the mail box, and she was in no hurry.

When she had traveled for two miles 'cross country and struck the main road, she met John Price, the owner of the adjoining ranch.

"Hello, Missy Carey," he greeted, when he was within hailing distance. "Are you bound for the mail?"

"Yes, I'm expecting a letter," Missy replied, "and the boys won't be back from the roundup till late, and I just couldn't wait."

"A letter, eh? Now, who from, I'd like to know? That Belgian soldier, I'll wager." Mr. Price pulled his horse into a walk beside Cappy.

"Now, how did you guess?" Missy laughed. "That's just who it is."

"Will you read it to me if you get it?"

"Course I will; don't I always? I've read his last letter to every one of the boys on our place at least twenty times. Next time I write him I'm going to tell him to address his next letter to the State of Wyoming."

“He’s a queer sort. Where did you ever get the idea of writin’ him?”

“Last winter at school—all the girls do it—we had a list of names from the War Relief Committee, and we each chose one. I got Henri, and I know he’s nicer than the rest.”

“Do you get sort of lonesome for school sometimes, Missy?” Mr. Price asked thoughtfully. “I suppose you do.”

“I don’t either,” Missy denied. “I’m so glad to be back home! Why, I used to die almost, cooped up in that house with nothing but streets to look at.”

“How did you like the teachers?” Mr. Price inquired. He was particularly fond of Missy, and it was with many misgivings that he had seen her go off the year before to a boarding school in Philadelphia.

Now that she had returned he was eager to prove her unchanged.

“Not much, they were sort of pokey,” Missy admitted. “And how they did disapprove of me! Why if I whistled, just softly to myself, you know, they’d talk about my breezy western way, and if I used any words like wrangle, or round up or—well you know—any of *our* words, they lifted their eyebrows and said: ‘My, how wild

and woolley that sounds!’ ” Mr. Price chuckled.

“Going back next year?” he inquired.

“No, Dad says I must, but I don’t think he’ll make me, not there, anyway. Of course, I’ve got to go on being educated, I suppose.” Missy accompanied the words with a profound sigh.

“Shucks, you’re educated enough as it is,” John Price exclaimed emphatically. “Why you can ride a horse better than—”

“But that’s not Latin grammar and the Classics,” Missy reminded him. “No, I’ve got to go to school. Dad says so, and so does Aunt Tab, so that’s all there is about it. But don’t let’s talk of it or *me* any more. Tell me some news about yourself. Have you sold any more horses to the English Government?”

Mr. Price thought for a moment, and then said slowly:

“No, and I can’t understand why not. You know, Missy, that my horses are second to none in this part of the country.”

“Except the Careys’, of course,” Missy teased.

“No, you don’t, I say second to none, not excepting yours. Well, I sold off a batch to that English dude that was here about three months ago, and just when I was expecting another visit

from him, I got a letter telling me in the most polite language—but telling me just the same—that I'm no good and my horses are worse."

John Price's honest face expressed indignation at the memory of that letter.

"Why I never heard of anything so queer," Missy replied wonderingly. "How do you explain it? You didn't sell him your broncos as Arab steeds, did you?"

"I did not, I took him out and I rounded up the best horses I had. They weren't much for beauty, I'll allow, but they were sound and healthy."

"Perhaps the ocean trip didn't agree with them," Missy suggested, and the subject was perforce dropped there, by their arrival at the mail box.

Missy jumped off her pony and took a handful of letters from her box. She sorted them hurriedly. "None for me, isn't that mean, and I was sure I'd hear to-day. Goodness, I hope Henri hasn't been killed. Aren't you going back home?" she inquired, as Mr. Price took his letters out of the box and put the rest back.

"No, I'm bound for the store," he answered. "I'll stop on my way back to-night. I guess Pete

can wait that long, though if he knew there was a letter for him from his girl in 'Frisco, he'd shoot me for keeping him waiting," he chuckled.

"It's a shame to keep him waiting so long. Give me the rest of the letters and I'll ride over and leave them for you."

"Make you late for supper, won't it?"

"No, Cappy and I can make it," Missy said, as she strapped the Price ranch mail together with her own, and jumped back into her saddle.

"The boys'll be mighty grateful if you will," Mr. Price said, "and I can come back by the Gulch short cut to-night and save a couple of miles."

"Then I'm off." Missy wheeled Cappy around. "No time to lose if I'm to get back at six for Chink's flapjacks. Good-by. Come over soon."

"I will," John Price replied as she trotted off. "And oh, Missy!" he called after her, "if there's anything I can say to your Dad about your not going back to school, you can bet I'll say it," he promised.

CHAPTER II

A PIEBALD PONY AND A BLACKSNAKE WHIP

BY the time that Missy had delivered the mail at the Price ranch and started for home, the sun was already well down in the west. Off in the distance the Big Horn range loomed black against the sky. Dusk was gathering in on all sides, and the plains were shadowed by the grotesque shapes that swayed mysteriously in the half light.

“Hurry up, old boy, or there’ll be no flapjacks for your mistress,” Missy coaxed, as she leaned well over the pommel of her saddle to whisper in the pony’s ear.

But Cappy refused to be hurried; he knew the danger of not looking where he was going, and he picked his way carefully and methodically from one rolling hill to the next. Sometimes the click of his little hoofs started the jack rabbits, out for their dinner, and they would scuttle across the path to the shelter of the sage brush.

Missy gave up worrying about the flapjacks and let her mind wander. She watched the color

fade from the sky as the sun sank lower behind the distant range. She had centered her attention on one tiny amber-tinted cloud, the last of the sunset, when Cappy threw back his head with a sudden jerk and whinnied.

Missy was nearly thrown from her saddle. She tightened her hold on the reins and scanned the darkening pasture, but she could see nothing. The evening breeze rustled the sage brush, and a little ahead in a clump of aspen trees two sleepy red steers stared at her peacefully.

“What is the matter with you, Cappy?” she demanded. “There’s nothing wrong; go along! I believe you are developing an imagination.”

Cappy started, but he kept his ears well forward, and a minute later he stopped again and whinnied. Missy turned the pony and rode in the direction from which the sound came. They were quite near the ranch house by now, and she knew that the pasture they were in ended in an abrupt draw to the right. The sound seemed to come from there.

She stopped Cappy and watched, wondering which one of the boys could be out at supper time. Whoever it was, he was at the bottom of the draw, and would soon come within sight. She waited, trying to soothe the excited Cappy.

Presently a man on a piebald pony climbed up the farthest side of the draw and disappeared into the darkness. There was something familiar in the way he rode and the long black snake whip that hung from his wrist and trailed along the ground.

Missy wheeled Cappy around and pricked him so sharply with her spurs that the astonished pony broke into a gallop and did not stop until he reached the corral gate.

The Careys' ranch house presented a different picture from the early afternoon. Supper was in progress, and the long, low-ceilinged dining-room was a confusion of voices and laughter. A long table occupied the center of the room. Mr. Carey sat at one end. He was a tall, spare man with a gray beard and bushy eyebrows, which tried to give him a look of stern severity but failed in the light of his laughing gray eyes.

His sister Tabitha sat at the other end of the table. She was a rosy-cheeked, little old lady with white hair and gentle manners. Years before, when Mrs. Carey had died, Mr. Carey had written to New England to beg his sister to make her home with him and help to care for his two children. And Miss Tabitha had come, bringing with her to the great spaces of Wyoming some-

thing of the prim spirit of New England and the fragrant memory of old-fashioned gardens and trim box hedges.

That was fifteen years ago, and she had been Miss Tab to all the cowboys on the ranch since that time.

Tom Carey sat beside his aunt. He was a younger, handsomer edition of his father, tall, thin and good-natured.

The rest of the places at the table were filled by the cowboys—twelve in all. They were a contented and genial lot. Tom, who acted as foreman for his father, had been the captain of his football team at college, and he managed the men under him much as he had managed his team, with the result that a good fellowship and loyalty to the ranch prevailed.

When Missy entered the dining-room, after she had unsaddled Cappy, the boys were teasing Ned.

“Where did you find that gopher hole, Ned?” “Shoulders” asked seriously. “I wish you’d tell me, I’ll mark it with a flag for the next Little Valley round up. Certainly was neat the way you led Jinx up to it.”

“Certainly was,” Tom agreed. “What did you do when you got home?”

“Ned helped me weed my garden,” Miss Tab

said, answering for him. "There was a dreadful lot of weeds there. I never could have done it myself."

"Well, now, that was real kind of Ned, wasn't it?" Dicky Barrows exclaimed with pronounced admiration. "And did he pick the lovely bunch of posies that are in the front room?" he asked with an innocent grin.

"I sure must find a gopher hole for the next round up," Shoulders said softly. "I'm real tired to-night."

Ned looked up wrathfully from his plate of flapjacks.

"That's right, go on; don't mind me. Say just exactly what you want," he said with furious calm. "I don't care; you can't bother me."

Dicky was about to reply when Missy came in. "Evening, Aunt Tab. Hello, boys. Am I awfully late, Dad?" she said as she slipped into the vacant seat beside her father. "I met Mr. Price and took his mail back for him, and that took quite a while."

Her father looked at her affectionately. "You're later than I'd ever be on flapjack night," he said. "I'm afraid the boys have eaten all your share."

Missy smiled confidently and looked at Chink.

The Chinaman shuffled out of the room and returned with a plate of steaming flapjacks.

“Chink, you villain!” Sandy Morgan shouted. “You just told me there were no more.”

Chink smiled apologetically and rolled his eyes. “I forget these to just now,” he said sorrowfully as he put the platter before Missy.

“See anybody else?” Tom called down the table to his sister.

“Yes, I did, Tommy,” she exclaimed, “and I meant to ask you about him the second I came in. Does Thud Sheldon still ride a piebald pony and carry a long black snake whip that trails on the ground?”

“Yes, he does,” several of the boys replied at once.

“Then I saw him to-night. He was just leaving the draw at the end of the home pasture,” Missy announced. She knew that her news would create a stir, for Thud Sheldon was the one ranch owner in that part of Wyoming who was thoroughly disliked by all his neighbors. He owned a small tract of land on the other side of the Carey ranch, and had won the reputation for general shiftlessness and dishonesty.

He owed the Carey ranch a particular grudge

for he had once been employed there as a cow puncher and discharged for dishonest dealings on an exchange of cattle.

“Thud Sheldon in our pasture!” Mr. Carey exclaimed incredulously. “Are you sure, Missy?”

“No, Dad, not perfectly sure; but I saw a man that looked like Thud. He was all hunched over in his saddle.”

“That’s him all right,” Shoulders said without regard for the rules of grammar. “I saw him the other day down at the store; he’s struck luck of some kind lately. He was all dressed up and had a brand new saddle. He’s bought a lot of new cattle too; he was talking about it to Fritz at the hotel.”

Mr. Carey’s face expressed surprise and a shade of anger.

“I told Thud four years ago never to set foot on my land again,” he said quietly, “and I thought he knew me well enough to realize I meant it.”

“Wish I’d seen him,” Tom said regretfully. “Do you think he recognized you, Missy?”

“No, I don’t think he did; he seemed in considerable of a hurry.”

“Dear, dear, what is this all about?” Miss Tab

inquired. "You all look so angry and upset, I'm sure if Mr. Sheldon crossed through our pasture he meant no harm."

"Of course not, Tabitha," Mr. Carey agreed. "He was probably late and just taking a short cut home," he added reassuringly. But he did not bother to explain where Thud was coming from. The fact that his ranch was beyond the Prices', and the town beyond that, left the possible place a question, and the answer seemed to be the Careys' north pasture land.

After supper was over the boys went out to the bunk house, and Mr. Carey read his mail in the front room that served as an office, while Aunt Tab knitted beside the lamp.

Missy and Tom went out and sat on the steps of the front porch. The stars were out and it was clear and cool.

"Mr. Price told me that the Englishman who bought his horses wrote him that they were no good," Missy said. "Mr. Price was as cross as anything about it."

"Don't blame him," laughed Tom; "I would be too. I suppose we'll be selling off some of our horses to one of the governments some day soon. Gee, I wish we could give them away," he said earnestly. "It's the least we can do to help out.

You didn't get any letter from Henri, did you?"

"Not to-day; maybe to-morrow, though. Sometimes they come on Wednesday instead of Tuesday," Missy replied. "Tommy, do you think we'll go to war?" she asked suddenly.

"I don't know; I should think we would."

"Will you go if we do?"

"Well, say! you don't suppose I'll stay home and pick daisies, do you?" Tom replied indignantly. "Of course, I'll go."

Missy put out her hand and squeezed his. "Silly, I know you would, but I wanted to hear you say so."

"Oh, Tom, come here a minute." Mr. Carey's voice came through the open window of the front room.

"You come too, Missy," he added; "this will interest you, too."

They both went to him.

"What's up, Daddy?" Missy demanded, perching on the arm of his chair.

"We are going to have company," her father told her. "Two Englishmen. They're coming next week to buy some horses for their government. Well, we'll be glad to sell them some, won't we, Tom?" he asked laughingly.

"Sure thing," Tom replied.

“Wonder if they’re the same ones who bought Mr. Price’s horses,” Missy said. “It would be funny if they liked ours better, wouldn’t it?”

Her father and brother were busy rereading the letter and did not answer her.

“Will you light my candle for me, dear?” Aunt Tab asked, as she folded up her knitting. “I think I’ll go up to bed.”

“Of course I will,” Missy answered, leaving her father; “and we’ll take a look at the guest room and think what we can do to it to make it presentable,” she said.

When she came downstairs again a little later she found her father alone. Tom had gone out to the barn. She put her arm on his shoulder.

“Dad, do you think that was Thud Sheldon I saw to-day?” she asked.

“Sounds like it,” her father admitted.

“What do you make out he was doing?”

Her father looked at her and laughed.

“Can’t say, my dear, but I guess it wasn’t much. Don’t let it worry your mind,” he replied, and dismissed the subject with a yawn and returned to his letters.

CHAPTER III

THE BELGIAN SOLDIER'S LETTER

MISSY shook her duster out of the window. There was not a particle of dust on it, but she shook it none the less vigorously for that.

Shoulders, riding in from the mail, saw it from a distant pasture and spurred his pony to even greater speed. He had the long-looked-for letter from Henri in his saddle bag, and he was eager to deliver it.

A week had passed since Missy had expected the letter, and it had been a week of secret anxiety at the ranch. None of the boys liked to admit their interest in Henri, but each one felt that the unknown Belgian soldier who wrote so quaintly to Missy was a link that connected them personally to the great war, and the breaking of that link would be a disaster.

Missy turned from the window and surveyed the guest room. Neat white curtains fluttered in the breeze, and Aunt Tab's most cherished blue and white crazy quilt covered the big double bed.

"There, if that doesn't suit their royal English

highnesses, I'm sorry," she said. "If I can smuggle up a bowl of flowers for the table without the boys seeing me, I'll do it, and then the room really will look sweet."

"But why shouldn't the boys see you, my dear?" Aunt Tab inquired in surprise. "I'm sure if you ask Ned, or any of the others, they'll be right glad to help pick them for you."

Missy was about to explain that, while the boys would gladly help Aunt Tab pick flowers, they would not be so eager to decorate the guest room for a tenderfoot. But she was saved by the timely arrival of Shoulders.

"Missy, come down here quick," he called from the front porch. "I've got your letter for you."

"From Henri?" Missy inquired, as she ran downstairs.

Shoulders' announcement brought some of the boys around from the back of the ranch house. They sat down on the steps and waited impatiently for Missy to open the square envelope of thin, gray, crinkly paper.

"That's his handwriting, isn't it?" Dick inquired.

"Sure, I looked first thing," Shoulders assured him. "I had a sort of a hunch that maybe he was in a hospital or something, but I guess not."



“Hurry up, Missy. What’s he say?”

Page 31

“Hurry up, Missy. What’s he say?” Tom inquired.

Missy was already deep in the letter.

“Oh, he says he’s sorry not to have written before, but his sector—” she began, but Tom interrupted.

“No, you don’t; read it the way he’s written it, and start from the beginning,” he insisted.

“Oh, all right, but you might let me read it first,” Missy protested. “He says:

“I am sorry not to have written you last week.”

“Don’t he start in with a dear or something?” Ned demanded.

“Oh, for pity sake,” Missy laughed. “He *do* Ned,” she teased. “I’ll start with the date.”

“May 19, third year of the war.

“Somewhere in Belgium.

“*My dear little Marraine:*

“I am sorry not to have written you last week but the guns of the Boches were trained on our sector for much of the time, and they gave us little space for writing. Also we have made an attack. I was in the front trenches and so enjoyed the honor of going ‘over the top’ as our English comrades say. I cannot picture for you

our terrible fight, my dear little Marraine. First because I fear the censor would not permit, and next because even the recollection is blackness to my mind, and might cause you distress. Of a necessity one must leave some of his comrades behind in such an attack.

“*C’est la guerre—*”

“What does that mean?” Sandy Morgan asked.

“It is the war,” Missy translated.

“Go on,” Tom prompted.

“But it is a thought not well to dwell upon,”—Missy continued reading—“much better it is to dream and think of my so-kind Marraine—my new sister. Do you mind if I call you that? Did I ever tell you that I had a little sister too? *Ma petite* Marieken, but that was before the war. Where she is to-day I cannot say. Our little village is under Boche rule.

“Bah, I return to those sad thoughts again. What a sorry fellow! you will think, is it not?”

“Now do listen again, *Chère* Marraine, and I will be more cheerful. Also I have a question to ask, perhaps you will like it, and perhaps not. It happens that I have a friend in our army who is in the cavalry. Now you must know that here we are scarce for horses, as the greedy Boches

took all from our village. Therefore, we have depended on the English who in their turn, I take it, depend on you in America. Now, my little Marraine, you wrote that you come from the land of horses—good horses—and yet what do I hear! The American horse is no good—so says my friend Philippe—and this statement leaves me in wonder. Also he tells me to ask what is the meaning of all the marks on the horses' hind quarters, and why must it be so. Can you tell me?"

"What do you suppose he's driving at?" Dicky demanded. "What's wrong with our horses, I'd like to know."

"I wish he had described the marks, maybe we could have found out what ranch they came from," Shoulders said. "Bet they didn't hail from around here."

"I'll tell Mr. Price they're some of his," Missy laughed.

"I don't think it's funny," Tom said seriously. "Somebody is selling bad horses and that's a mean game. What else does Henri say, Missy?"

"Let's see, where was I— Oh, yes, here—

"You ask me, dear little Marraine—"

"That's the fourth time he's said that," Ned grumbled, but Missy ignored him and read on:

“What it is I want most in the trenches: Well, I will tell you. Tobacco! tobacco! tobacco! With it I am happy in spite of the war; without it I am desolate.

“Good-by, my little friend. In another week I will write again.

“Your devoted Belgian Soldier,”

“HENRI DE BRUIN.”

“P. S. I forgot to say that in the attack we captured two of the enemies' trenches, which is considered by most not so bad.”

“Not so bad! I should say not!” Tom exclaimed. “I wish, Missy, the next time you write him you'd tell him that painful though the picture of the fight would be for his dear little Marraine, you've a brother and several blood-thirsty friends who are aching for all the details.”

“Just imagine his not knowing where his little sister is,” Missy said softly. “Poor boy.”

“I guess he's a plucky sort of a fellow,” Dicky remarked. “I liked that calm, *C'est la guerre*—shows courage.”

“Don't forget to explain about the brands on the horses,” Ned grumbled; “tell him we tried tying pink ribbons on their ears to distinguish them, but it didn't work,” he advised sarcastically.

Missy paid no attention to the suggestion.

“If he wants tobacco, tobacco he must have,” she said. “Will you get the right kind for me, Tommy?”

“Of course; and say, while we’re about it, let’s send enough to last a while,” Tom replied.

Shoulders put his hand in the pocket of his flannel shirt and took out a quarter. “There’s my donation for the first batch,” he said shyly. “I don’t just like to think of a man without a smoke.” The rest followed suit, and Tom collected the donations in his hat.

“I’ll make Dad double it!” Missy said, as she counted the money.

The sound of an automobile attracted their attention and they looked down the road.

“There comes Dad and Tim now. Wonder where the Englishmen are?” Tom said.

“Where’s your passengers?” Shoulders called as the car stopped at the side of the house.

“They are unavoidably detained,” Mr. Carey answered with a short laugh. “Anyway that’s what the telegram that I found waiting for me at the station said. What do you think of that? Let me drive all the way in to town for nothing.”

“When are they coming?” Missy asked. “Did it say?”

“Oh, yes, it said they’ll be here to-morrow morning, they hope, and not later than the afternoon train, sure.”

“Well, that is definite,” Tom laughed. “You’d better take your lunch with you, Dad.”

“I’d better do nothing of the kind,” his father replied decidedly. “You can go in and meet them to-morrow, son. I’ve waited all the time I intend to.”

“Thanks, I’ve other things to do, and anyway they’ll be expecting you,” Tom said.

“Then they’ll be disappointed. I’m a busy man and when I make a date, I keep it. Here’s your candy, Missy, and Tim has a long message for you from Flora Dodd.” Mr. Carey tossed a box to his daughter and went into the house.

Tim joined the group on the steps.

“What’s the message?” Missy demanded. “Anything exciting?”

Tim deliberated. He took off his sombrero and mopped his forehead.

“Reckon I’ve forgotten what she said,” he remarked carelessly, his eyes on the unopened candy.

Missy understood the hint and opened the box. The boys all helped themselves and Tim remembered his message.

“Flora says to tell you that there’s a dance tomorrow night at the hotel. She has a lot of girls on from California visiting her, and she says you must come and bring all the boys, especially Ned, he’s such a grand dancer.” Tim added the last as his own personal touch to Flora’s message, but Ned took it quite seriously.

“Well, she can get along without me this time,” he said importantly. “Last time I had a dance with her she forgot about it so she could dance with Shoulders.”

“Ah, could you blame her?” Shoulders inquired modestly.

“Of course we’ll all go!” Missy exclaimed hurriedly, to prevent further discussion. “That is, if Dad says so. Do you think he’ll let me, Tommy?”

“If I take you,” her brother replied, “and I will if you’re a real good little girl in the meantime; pass the candy, please.”

“Oh, but the Englishmen will be here,” Missy remembered suddenly. “What will we do with them? They can’t stay home and play patience with Aunt Tab.”

“We’ll take them with us; that’s a scheme,” Shoulders suggested. “Listen, I’ve been thinking quietly while you’ve been talking and I’ve

come to the conclusion that the least we can do for those procrastinating tenderfoots is to give them a real western welcome."

Sandy looked up from the lariat he was weaving. "D'ye mean the old tricks—blank cartridges and lots of noise, and a wild bronco—"

"Well, something like that, without the noise," Shoulders admitted.

"They certainly deserve something after that false start," Tim said, thinking of the long ride in the sun.

Tom laughed.

"Don't be too rough on them; remember they're going to buy our horses."

"Oh, we'll be gentle but cordial," laughed Dicky.

"I've got it!" Shoulders exclaimed. "Remember the dude Mr. Price had visiting him?"

"Yes."

"Well, he insisted on having an English saddle—we'll put—no, guess I won't tell you about it. Just hang around and watch me when they come—that's all."

And though the others tried to make him tell his plan, Shoulders resolutely refused and thereby deepened the mystery.

CHAPTER IV

THE TENDERFOOT ARRIVES

“**A**RE they here yet, Shoulders?” Missy turned Cappy loose in the corral and tiptoed into the barn, as though she expected to find the Englishmen hiding behind the feed box.

Shoulders was mending an old bridle; he looked up and laughed a deep chuckle of appreciation.

“They are, Missy, they are,” he replied.

“Tenderfeet?” Missy inquired.

Shoulders shook his head. “Not the Englishman,” he told her. “He’s just a plain hard man; gray hair and plenty of horse sense, I gather. But oh, Missy, the party that’s with him!”

“Isn’t he English too?”

“Not he—American—a real nice boy with pretty hair and an expensive education. And clothes! Oh, Missy, he has such beautiful clothes, it’s goin’ to be a shame the way Jinx is going to mess ’em up,” Shoulders added softly.

“But I thought Dad said—” Missy began.

“He did. He thought until the train pulled in

that they were both Englishmen," Shoulders interrupted. "That's what I'll explain if you give me time. It's this way.

"Captain Forrest, that's the Englishman, has been visiting friends of his in Indiana, and he had the other Englishman along with him. Well, he's not very healthy, see? So he gets sick at the last minute and has to stay with the Captain's friends. Well, here's the Captain left with the two tickets for Wyoming, so he gives one of them to the friend's son, the beautiful Mr. Allan Webb, who spent last summer on the Mexican border and still doesn't know a horse from a cow."

"Is he in the army?" Missy inquired with a decided show of interest.

"He was last summer," Shoulders admitted, "but he's resting now."

"Is he young?"

"He is, and he'll never be anything else."

"Well, don't be too rough on him," Missy advised. "I've got to go and wash up for dinner."

"Where've you been all afternoon?" Shoulders inquired.

"Over at Price's. I read the boys Henri's letter, and they all chipped in for more tobacco. They're riding in for the dance to-night."

Shoulders nodded approval, and Missy left him and sauntered over to the ranch house. She found Chink peeling potatoes on the kitchen porch.

“Where’s the company?” she inquired.

“Everybody in sittin’-room,” Chink told her.

“Oh, bother, how will I get upstairs without their seeing me.” Missy looked down at her muddy riding habit.

Chink raised his eyebrows and then a broad smile spread over his wrinkled, yellow face.

He pointed to the slanting roof that sloped to within ten feet of the ground.

“Not long ago Missy go up there,” he said.

“Guess it’s about the only way to-day,” Missy replied laughingly. “Give me a lift, Chink.”

The Chinaman held his hands together like a stirrup, and Missy sprang, caught the corner of the roof, and pulled herself up and disappeared by way of the window into her own room.

She chose a white dress with cherry-colored ribbons at the waist and throat, and put it on carefully. Then she hesitated, looking at her own reflection in her glass.

She twisted her dark braid into a knot at the back of her head and viewed the effect. It was

very becoming; a little pull here and a dab there, so that the hair fluffed ever so little over the temples, decided the question.

“It’s got to go up sometime and it might as well to-night,” she said to herself. “Anyway, there’s company, and the boys can’t tease me.” She tiptoed down the hall to Aunt Tab’s room and helped herself to a package of hairpins. Then she returned and sat down before her bureau.

It was not until the rest were seated that she went down to supper.

Captain Forrest and Mr. Webb sat at either side of Mr. Carey, and Missy saw to her dismay that the only vacant place left at the table was beside the latter.

An astonished silence greeted her entrance. The boys, who were silent and abashed in the presence of the strangers, looked up, stared for a full and awkward minute, and then fell to eating their supper with considerable clashing of knives and plates.

“Missy, meet Captain Forrest and Mr. Webb,” Mr. Carey said, and Missy nodded. Both men rose and bowed, and Allan Webb pulled out her chair—not a word was spoken.

Missy was beginning to think that the worst

was over when Aunt Tab called from the other end of the long table,

“Why, dear, you’ve put your hair up. It looks real sweet too. What made you do it?”

Ill-suppressed grins appeared on the faces of all the boys, and Missy blushed. At last she managed to say,

“Why, it’s so hot, Aunt Tab, and I’ve often worn it this way at school.”

“Very sweet, my dear, very sweet,” Aunt Tab nodded, and went on with her meal.

“Do you go to boarding school?” Allan Webb inquired. Missy turned as he spoke and looked straight at him for the first time. He did have pretty hair, as Shoulders had said, and he wore it in a very becoming pompadour. And his clothes were certainly beautiful. He had on a tan shirt and a neat little green tie, and his coat was cut to show just enough of the soft tan cuffs.

Missy looked from him to the line of gray flannel shirts, and smiled.

“Yes, I go to Miss Pink’s school in Philadelphia,” she said, most of her embarrassment gone.

“Do you really! Now isn’t that a queer coincidence?” Allan exclaimed. “Was there a girl there named Violet Mayfield?”

“Why, yes, do you know her?” Missy replied

eagerly. "She's awfully nice. I don't know her very well,—she's in the class ahead of mine—but she's ever so popular at school."

"She's my cousin," Allan explained. "We live in the same town, that is, when I'm at home, which isn't often. We used to be awfully great old pals, but I went away to college and she to school, and we sort of lost track of each other."

"Nice of her to give us something to talk about, isn't it?" Missy asked, smiling.

"Don't you think we could have discovered another subject if we hadn't discovered her?" Allan inquired softly.

Missy wished the boys would say something; she had a sudden feeling of acting before an audience and she didn't dare say what she wanted to.

"I suppose so," she replied.

"What else *do* you suppose we would have talked about?" Allan persisted.

Missy heard Shoulders laugh, although he tried to disguise the gurgling sound as a cough. "Oh, we might have talked about the dance we're going to," Missy said hurriedly. "Has Dad told you?"

"Yes, he was kind enough to ask me to join the party," Allan replied politely.

“Going?” Missy asked.

“Why, yes, if you want me to, and you’re sure I won’t be a trouble. You don’t expect to ride, do you?”

“Not to-night,” Missy told him. “We sometimes do, but I guess we’ll go in the car this time.”

“That’s good news,” Allan replied gratefully. “Of course, I’d be a sport and go on horseback, if you said so, but I’ll be honest and admit that I’d rather make the acquaintance of my horse in the daylight.”

“Do you ride?” Missy asked.

“Oh, yes, but I’m hardly bred to er—well; this sort of riding.” He waved his hand toward the window.

“Oh, you’ll like it,” Missy promised him as they left the table.

CHAPTER V

A DISCOVERY BETWEEN DANCES

THE town of Preacher's Corners had one main street that ended in the Preacher's Corners' hotel—a four-story, frame building with a stucco entrance flanked by two plate-glass windows. It was an old place and had undergone many managements and many repairs in its life. It had always served as the social center for the surrounding country.

On the first floor the office and the bar divided the front, and the dining-room ran the entire length of the building at the back. Upstairs there were two small parlors and some card rooms for the men. A billiard table took up most of the space in the square hall.

A good many guests were already there for the dance, before the Careys' car arrived, and a varied assortment of automobiles lined the street.

Mr. Carey, Captain Forrest and Aunt Tab had stayed at home, but the rest of the household had left directly after supper for the dance.

Missy and Tom rode in the back of the automo-

bile with Allan Webb, and Ned sat in front beside Tim. The rest of the boys followed on horseback.

“My, what a lot of people!” Missy exclaimed as they stopped before the hotel. “Hurry up, Tommy. You show Mr. Webb where to leave his hat, and I’ll meet you later.”

She ran up the stairs to the second floor and into one of the parlors—the room was already filled with girls.

“Why, Missy Carey, you’ve put your hair up!” Flora Dodd cried out from the center of a group in front of the one looking glass. “And you look perfectly stunning.”

“What a sweet dress!” some one else exclaimed, “and I believe you’ve got on high heels.”

“Little Missy grown up at last,” Mrs. Dodd laughed. “Come here and let’s look at you.”

Missy turned around slowly for their inspection. There were some of the girls she did not know. They were Flora’s school friends, and they were city girls beyond a doubt, for their clothes fluffed and frilled, and seemed oddly out of place beside Missy’s simple white frock.

“Oh, you must meet my friends,” Flora exclaimed. “I’d forgotten you didn’t know them. Marion Giles, Lucile George, Ethel Baxter. No,

this one in the pink dress is Ethel; and Jessie Bangs. Girls, this is Missy Carey, one of my neighbors and long-distance friends."

Flora was short and plump, with a broad smiling face, and a decided pug nose. Every one liked her for her good-natured friendliness.

"How many of your boys came over?" she inquired after Missy had shaken hands with all the girls.

"All of them, and the Price boys are all coming too," Missy replied.

"Well, I like that! I saw Pete yesterday and he said he wouldn't come for anybody!" Flora exclaimed.

"You always could do anything you liked with those boys, Missy."

"Oh, all Pete needed was a little coaxing; he really wanted to come," Missy laughed.

"I've brought a tenderfoot along too," she added. "He's with us right now, and he wanted to come. I guess he can dance."

"Where's he from?" Flora demanded. And the other girls showed a fluttering interest.

"Indiana," Missy told them. "He's very nice and I hope he has a good time, though I'm afraid he's going to be disappointed."

"Why?" Ethel Baxter inquired.

“Oh, nothing, only from the questions he asked me I know he expects a sort of barn dance with Indians sitting around to give local color,” Missy explained.

“Well, all the men will be disappointed and go home if you don’t hurry down,” Flora’s mother advised. “Go along with you, you’re prinked enough.”

In the dining-room below, all the tables had been moved out and all the chairs ranged along the wall. The musicians were at one end, and a bowl of lemonade, in charge of the hostess, at the other.

Missy’s entrance with Flora and her friends made a decided stir. The boys came up in groups of twos and threes. They were a little shy of the city girls, and so used to Flora that they paid her little attention. But Missy, with her hair up and her eyes dancing in eager anticipation, claimed their frankest admiration and they begged for dances.

“I promised Shoulders the first one,” she said as Pete offered his arm, “but I’ll give you the next one, and, Dave, you can have the one after that.”

“Where do I come in?” Dicky Barrows demanded as he joined the group. “Missy, you

oughter dance with your own outfit first, especially the first time you put your hair up," he teased.

Missy saw Tom beckoning her from across the room. "I'll dance with you all if I have to dance until six to-morrow morning," she promised gayly, "but I've got to go to Tom now."

Her brother greeted her with a sigh of relief as she came up to him.

"You take care of Mr. Webb, Missy," he said, and left her abruptly.

Missy led her astonished guest over to Flora, and introduced him all around. At sight of the girls in regular dance dresses Allan gained courage, and when the music started he asked the delighted Jessie Bangs for the first dance.

Shoulders, always one or two minutes late, claimed Missy, and they whirled away in a one-step.

"What subject can we talk about, Miss Carey?" he mimicked. "I think your hair looks so sweet up like that. Sure it won't fall down?"

"Shoulders, you tease, stop making fun of Mr. Webb, he's awfully nice. See how well he dances," Missy admonished. Shoulders looked.

"Graceful like a fairy," he scoffed. "No use, Missy, I don't agree. Anyway, Tom told me

some of the crazy questions he asked on the way in. He's a tenderfoot, you can't deny it."

"I suppose he is, Shoulders," Missy admitted, "but he's a nice tenderfoot anyway."

The dance ended without further discussion, and they joined the throng around the lemonade table.

Missy noticed that she was standing just back of Allan Webb and Jessie Bangs. Every one was talking and laughing, and some of the men were jostling each other good-naturedly.

Missy was just going to speak to them when she heard Allan say, "I think little Miss Carey is a remarkably stunning girl, don't you?" His voice was low and in sharp contrast to the noise about him.

"Well, she thinks you're a tenderfoot," came the reply.

Missy shivered and looked at the back of Jessie Bangs' head. It tossed a little as she repeated the remark of the dressing-room.

Missy did not wait to hear more. She dragged the astonished Shoulders away and sat down in a corner of the room.

She was horrified and furious at herself. She explained to Shoulders and was not in the least comforted by his hearty laugh.

Allan Webb passed her with a cool nod, and she felt suddenly as if she wanted to hide, she was so ashamed.

Shoulders teased her and told the tale to Pete, who came up to claim the next dance, and somehow the story got around and poor Missy was utterly miserable.

Between dances the men all stood at one end of the room and the girls sat along one side. Missy chose a corner by herself. But each time that the music started some one of the boys came and insisted upon her dancing with them in spite of her protests that she was tired.

She danced again with Shoulders and once with Tom. He cheered her up in a brotherly way by explaining that she was a silly kid to care, for she only told the truth, and that the girl was the one to blame.

At last came the ordeal of dancing with Allan. Missy could not refuse, and she was so embarrassed she could only answer yes and no to his remarks. To add to her misery, her hair began to fall down and several pins slipped out.

She heard the music stop with heartfelt relief and hurried to the dressing-room to repair the damage.

She found the room empty, and after she had

fixed up her hair she sat down in the corner to think things out.

“Well, I’ve certainly done it this time,” she said to herself. “Why did I ever tell that horrid girl that he was a tenderfoot, and what ever possessed me to put up my hair? The boys never wanted to dance with me so often before. Oh, dear, if being grown up means getting into mixups like this, then I’d rather stay young.” She jabbed a hatpin angrily into her hair, and straightened her belt. “Wonder what he meant when he said I looked stunning? Nothing much, I guess. Perhaps he was trying to find some subject to talk about to that Jessie Bangs. Well, he found one,” she laughed in spite of herself. “Suppose I’d better go back downstairs or Shoulders and Ned will be up here looking for me. Oh land, here they come now!”

The heavy tread of men’s boots sounded from the other end of the hall, and Missy hid behind the door. She would go back, of course, but she didn’t want to be pulled back. After a little she could distinguish the voices; they were not the boys, but what they were saying made her catch her breath.

“I tell you, old man Carey ain’t the man to fool with,” some one was saying.

“He don’t know; how can he? Didn’t you work it all right with Price, and him none the wiser?” another voice answered. And Missy recognized it as belonging to Fritz Schultz, the manager of the hotel.

They passed her door and went on toward one of the card rooms at the other end of the corridor.

Missy stood perfectly still for a minute and made up her mind. Then she tiptoed after them. The card room was filled with men who were playing, and the room was thick with blue cigar smoke.

Fritz and his companion, whom Missy recognized as Thud Sheldon, did not enter the room. They stood at the doorway, as if undecided whether to go in or not. Missy slipped down the hall. No one was using the billiard table, and the light above it was out; it was a safe hiding place. She held her breath as she passed in back of the two men; they did not see her, and she hurried into the shadow beyond. The rubber cover for the billiard table was on the floor and she covered the white of her dress under it as she crouched beneath the table.

She was not ten feet away from the two men, and if they continued their talk she would be able

to hear them—she waited anxiously—a hundred fears running through her mind. Suppose they decided to play billiards and discovered her there!

For a long time nothing happened; they just stood and watched the card players. Then Fritz nodded and they walked over toward her. Missy heard them say,

“We might as well settle that now.”

One of them leaned heavily against the table; Missy heard it creak under his weight.

“Well, I’m agreeable as long as I can keep out of Carey’s way,” Thud said gruffly.

“I tell you that’s all right. I’ve got the men; all you have to do is to have your outfit with your horses this side of Little Gulch. The rest is as easy as the Price deal.” Fritz’s voice sounded impatient. There was a pause.

“I’ll be there all right,” Thud said gloomily, “but I wish it was any man but Carey.”

“I should think you’d be glad to get even with him,” Fritz exclaimed.

Thud laughed a short, ugly laugh. “Nothing I’d like better,” he replied, “if I don’t get caught.”

They moved back to the doorway without more words and finally joined a game of poker.

Missy waited until she heard the even flap of the cards as they played, and then stole back down the hall to the dressing-room.

She took her hair down, and fixed it all over, thinking hard as she did it. Her dress was covered with dust from the floor, and she shook it as best she could. Then she tiptoed out of the room and went back to the dance.

Her eyes were shinier than ever, and, far from being sorry about Allan Webb, she was glad that she had called him a tenderfoot.

CHAPTER VI

NOT SUCH A TENDERFOOT AFTER ALL

MISSY'S dreams that night were a strange confusion in which billiard tables, hairpins, and Thud Sheldon played important parts.

When she awoke the next morning it was with a sense of excitement and a feeling of personal importance. She dressed hurriedly and went out to the barn. Tom was sitting on the top of the corral fence. He was waiting for breakfast and amusing himself by calling suggestions to Chink, who appeared at intervals on the back porch.

"Tommy," Missy said as she came up to him, "get down from that fence and listen to me."

"Why?" Tom inquired lazily. "I can listen just as well from up here. What's the news?"

Missy nodded her head mysteriously.

"Very well, stay up there if you want to," she said, "but when you hear what I've got to say you'll very likely fall off."

"I'll take a chance," Tom laughed. "Go ahead with your news."

“ ’Member when I went upstairs last night to fix my hair? ” Missy inquired with suppressed excitement.

“ Yes. ”

“ Well, I heard something. ”

“ What? ”

“ A conversation between Fritz and Thud Sheldon about Dad. ” Missy related what she had heard.

Tom listened with growing astonishment.

“ And you got under the billiard table? ” he inquired incredulously. “ Say, Missy, are you sure they didn’t see you? ”

“ Of course I am, ” Missy assured him. “ When I passed the door, Thud had his back turned toward me, and you know how near-sighted Fritz is. ”

“ Why didn’t you tell me last night? ” Tom demanded.

“ I didn’t get a chance; you were busy dancing, and I didn’t want to say anything in front of Mr. Webb. ”

“ Guess you were right; he mustn’t know, and neither must Captain Forrest. This is strictly the Carey ranch’s affair. ”

“ What do you suppose they’re up to, and what did he mean by ‘you have your horses there’? ”

“Don’t know, but I’m going to find out. I’ll be at the Gulch. You’re sure he didn’t say what day?”

“No, he just told him he’d let him hear. I suppose it’s the day our horses go. He must have played some trick on Price too. Tommy, if you go to the Gulch will you take me?”

“You! I should say not. Why, you’re a girl, and this may be dangerous.”

“Oh, all right,” Missy replied, a hurt note in her voice. She turned and went through the kitchen into the house. Not for the world would she have admitted how Tom’s words hurt her. It was the first time in their lives that he had ever reminded her that she was a girl and therefore not eligible for risky adventures.

“Serves me right for putting my hair up,” she said to her reflection in the kitchen glass. “Well, it’s down this morning and down it stays.”

“Missy speak?” Chink inquired from the stove. “Everyting velly bad to-day; eggs break, fire don’t burn. Me, I tell Mr. Tommy to stop those talkings.”

“He won’t tease you any more, Chink,” Missy replied. “He’s got something else to think about now.”

After breakfast, Allan Webb stood on the

bottom rung of the corral gate. He was watching Shoulders saddle Jinx. It was not a reassuring sight. The little bronco was objecting with spirit. He had been resting in the comfortable barn ever since his fall into the gopher hole, and he resented having his convalescence cut short.

Allan watched his antics for a few minutes, then asked quite naturally,

“Why don’t you tie him?”

Shoulders bestowed a withering glance of contempt on him in reply, and went on chasing the pony.

Dicky Barrows and Sandy Morgan went to his assistance, and Ned leaned on the gate beside Allan.

“Jinx just naturally hates a saddle,” he remarked sorrowfully.

Allan looked at him and smiled nervously.

“Does he hate a rider too,” he inquired.

“No, indeed, once he’s saddled he’s a regular lamb, or maybe I should say after he’s mounted.”

“It seems to me they’re awfully rough on him. Now, if they tried a little gentle handling he might come around.”

“Maybe he might, Mister, but I’m not so sure; he’d hardly understand the treatment, he’s a suspicious sort of animal.”

“Well, I’m glad I don’t have to ride him.”

“Why, ain’t they saddling him for you?”

Ned’s look of surprise was genuine.

“I hope not,” Allan replied with feeling. “I asked Mr. Carey if I could have a half-way gentle animal; I never suspected he meant me to have this.” He looked discomfortingly at the bronco.

“Oh, well, Jinx is gentle enough,” Ned assured him. “Fact is, he’s the gentlest pony on the ranch, barring his contrary aversion to a saddle. They’re fixing him for you all right.”

Shoulders had succeeded in saddling the bronco by now and led him triumphantly over to the gate.

“Here he is; sorry to keep you waiting,” he apologized, “but Jinx always is hard to saddle.”

Allan looked from one face to the other. The boys were all grinning with polite interest, but he felt an implied criticism. He was still smarting from the memory of Missy’s words the night before.

“Thanks,” he said shortly, and went up to Jinx.

Shoulders handed the reins to him and retired to the fence.

Allan patted the pony’s neck and put his hand on the pommel of the saddle. Jinx’s ears went

up and he backed around. Allan followed, but every time he attempted to mount, the pony would wheel away from him. They were soon following each other around in circles.

“Looks like a merry-go-round, doesn’t it?” Dicky asked softly.

“Poor old Jinx is shying at those beautiful white pants,” Shoulders remarked. “Can’t blame him much, they are awful dazzling.”

“There goes his hat,” Ned said sadly. “Poor man, I wonder what he thinks he’s doing?”

It would have been hard to say, for Allan was still following Jinx around the corral.

But if the cowboys thought for a moment that he was not alive to the ridiculousness of his position, they were mistaken. Allan was burning with suppressed wrath, but he was helpless before the impatient pony.

At last, he managed to get one foot in the stirrup and his hand on the pommel of the saddle, but the wiley Jinx would permit no further advantage. With a quick forward lunge he jumped aside, and when next Allan had time to think he was sitting in the middle of the corral, a sharp pain in his right ankle and a good deal of dust in his mouth.

He looked around, to discover that Missy had

joined the group of boys and was hanging over the gate. Cappy grazed beside her, his reins on the ground.

Allan picked himself up and smiled foolishly.

"Hope you didn't hurt yourself," Shoulders said politely.

"No, not myself exactly," he replied, "but my pride's a trifle damaged. I had an idea I could ride, but Jinx seems to point to the contrary."

"Had enough for this morning?" Dicky asked.

"Oh, no, I'm going to ride him yet," Allan said cheerfully.

A change of expression passed over the faces of the cowboys. Pluck and determination even in a tenderfoot were worthy of admiration.

Shoulders jumped lightly off the fence.

"I'll bring him back here for you," he offered, and went over to the now innocent and peaceful Jinx, who was grazing soberly in the far corner of the corral.

"I'm afraid you're pretty dusty, aren't you?" Missy said, "and I hope you aren't hurt. Perhaps you'd rather try my pony," she suggested.

"No, thanks, I'll stick to Jinx," Allan replied. "That is, as long as he'll let me."

Shoulders led the pony to him and he tried once more, but it was the same thing over again.

After he had fallen for the fourth time, Missy went to him.

A sudden and unexplainable wish to see him ride successfully had come to her.

“Jump for the saddle and don’t give Jinx time to know you’re there,” she whispered hurriedly; “he’ll be a lamb once you’re on if you give him his head.”

Allan looked at her.

“Thanks, I’ll try,” he said quite humbly.

He took the bridle from the grinning Shoulders and jumped for the saddle, but Jinx was ready for him, and he was a minute too late.

“I guess I’ll get him myself this time,” he said to Dicky, who was ambling up to the corral after him. “Maybe he doesn’t like an audience.”

He walked quietly up behind the pony and without any preliminaries vaulted lightly into the saddle.

The victory was won. Jinx shied a little from surprise but did not attempt to buck.

Shoulders swung the gate open and the rest of the boys cheered lustily. Allan touched the pony’s flank with his spur. Jinx reared a little and then broke into a run. A cloud of sunlit dust enveloped them a minute later as they dashed down the road.

“Not so bad for a tenderfoot,” Shoulders said grudgingly. “I like his grit.”

“I think he’s splendid,” Missy exclaimed as she mounted Cappy. “I guess I’d better go and see if he’s all right though. Jinx is sure to be pretty lively.”

She rode off down the road in the direction that Allan had taken, but she did not catch up with him until she had ridden over a mile.

Jinx had come to the conclusion that he could not throw his rider, and, like a sensible pony, was making the best of it. He was jogging along quite peacefully when Allan heard Cappy’s hoofbeats. He turned in his saddle, saw Missy, and waited until she caught up with him.

“Hello,” Missy greeted him. “Where are you bound for?”

“Ask Jinx,” Allan laughed; “he’s the boss.”

“It didn’t look like it a few minutes ago,” Missy replied. “You certainly got the better of him. You—you were great!” she added honestly.

Allan looked at her without answering, and she knew exactly what he was thinking of.

“Mr. Webb,” she said suddenly, “I’m sorry I called you a tenderfoot. I didn’t mean it, really. Will you excuse me, please?”

“Of course I will,” Allan laughed. It was impossible to be angry with a girl who wore her hair down her back, and who rode and talked like a boy. “I was sort of cross last night, but now that I know I am one—”

“But you’re not,” Missy denied. “You’re splendid. I wish I could tell you a secret, but I can’t. If I could you’d be awfully glad I called you a tenderfoot.”

Then, because she was afraid she had said too much, she spurred Cappy to such a pace that conversation was impossible until they reached the ranch house.

Dinner was ready and most of the boys were in their places as Missy looked in on her way upstairs. She heard Captain Forrest say: “If your men will round up the horses on Thursday, I’ll send my men over for them. It’s good of you to offer to drive them to the junction, but I know you’re busy and I’ve already engaged my boys.”

Tom looked up and caught Missy’s eye and winked solemnly.



“She spurred Cappy to such a pace that conversation was impossible.”

Page 69

CHAPTER VII

PREPARING FOR WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN

THURSDAY drew near and with it an atmosphere of suppressed excitement pervaded the Carey ranch. Shoulders laughed softly and patted his gun lovingly at odd intervals, and Ned's voice took on a deeper note of sorrow.

Mr. Carey and Tom were anxious that neither of their guests should suspect anything, so that conversation was more stilted than ever, for it is difficult to avoid such an all-absorbing topic.

Allan Webb and Missy rode a good deal during the few days that intervened, and Captain Forrest with Mr. Carey selected a hundred horses for shipment.

On Wednesday morning the guests left. Tim took them into Preacher's Corners in the automobile. They were going south to another ranch.

"It's been awfully nice being here," Allan said as he stood on the ranch house steps beside Missy, "and you've been very patient with a tender-foot."

“Oh dear, I wish you wouldn’t say that,” Missy protested. “You know I don’t think you’re a tenderfoot any more.”

“Well, that’s good news,” Allan laughed, “but I guess there’s still room for improvement. I wish I didn’t have to say good-by so soon.”

“I wish so too,” Missy replied, “it’s been a lot of fun having you here. Don’t forget you’ve promised to come back sometime next year.”

“Oh, but I’m going to see you before that,” Allan announced confidently. “I have a little scheme up my sleeve that you’ll hear about one of these days.”

“Tell me about it now.”

“No, indeed; it’s a dead secret, but you wait.”

“Come along, Webb,” Captain Forrest called. “Good-by, Miss Carey; you’ve been very good to us, and good-by again, sir.” He held out his hand to Mr. Carey. “I am well satisfied with our transaction, and I hope the horses get over in as good condition as they are in now.”

“They will, I can promise you that,” Mr. Carey replied with conviction. “And I hope they will be of good service to your army.”

“Perhaps we’ll be sending over some of our men to teach you how to ride them, Captain,” Allan laughed. “They’ll have to be from this

part of the country though; I'm glad I'm in the infantry."

"We'll welcome them heartily when they do come," the Captain answered seriously as he shook hands.

"It won't be long now by the looks of things," Mr. Carey said. "Good-by and good luck."

"Good-by."

"Good-by."

Tim started the car and they were gone.

Mr. Carey and Missy watched them out of sight and then went around to the corral where Tom and Shoulders were waiting.

"I'll ride over to Price's this morning, boys, and tell him how things stand. I've an idea that he may be interested."

"Of course he will," Missy exclaimed, "because the very thing that Thud Sheldon is going to do to us, he did to Mr. Price. Fritz kept reminding him about it."

"If some of their boys want to join us to-morrow, why so much the better. I hope, though, there won't be any scrap," her father replied.

"If they *want* to!" laughed Shoulders. "I'd like to see you keep Pete out of it once he got wind of what's doing."

"I'm riding over to get Bronson," Tom said,

picking up the reins of his pony grazing beside him. "As sheriff he'll have to be along. He was grumbling the other day that the good old exciting times were past and gone, so this ought to be good news." He swung easily into the saddle.

"So-long, I'll be back for dinner."

"Well, I'm off for Price's: better keep Jinx and Ranger and Skittles fresh to-day. We may have some hard riding to-morrow," Mr. Carey advised. "I'll be back before long. Where are you going, Missy?"

"Oh, just into town to see Flora," Missy replied. "If you all are mean enough not to let me go with you, I've got to be amused somehow."

Her father looked at her and shook his head in perplexity.

"You ought to have been a boy, Missy," he said. "You certainly are material wasted, but you're not one, and you can't expect us to let you ride into possible danger, so put those foolish notions out of your head and have a nice time with the girls."

Missy received the advice and watched her father ride away in silence. Then she turned to Shoulders and stamped her foot.

"I think it's just a fright the way you're all

making me grow up," she said angrily. "I know that before I went to boarding school Dad would have let me go."

"He would not," Shoulders denied. "Ah, Missy, don't be so mad, it's a darn shame you have to be out of the fun, but, honest, we couldn't let you go along. There may be a little shooting, and perhaps a regular row; we don't know what we'll find and you couldn't go."

He was doing his best to comfort her—he understood exactly how she felt, but whereas a year ago he might have listened to her teasing and perhaps helped her at least to watch the fun from a distant hill, he now felt with Tom and her father that she was a girl and must be diligently protected from danger. He didn't stop to justify this new conception; perhaps the revelation of Missy in a new white dress with her hair up had wrought the change, or perhaps it had been more gradual.

At any rate some of the old natural fellowship was gone and a new consideration took its place. Missy sorely resented the change.

"If I had known how you were going to act, I would never have breathed a word to any of you," she protested. "I'd have gone to the Gulch and found out what was up myself; I'm

not afraid of Thud Sheldon, and I can ride and shoot as well as any of you; Mr. Price says so. Oh, if I ever hear anything like this again, just you catch me telling you or Tommy about it," she added threateningly.

Shoulders tried to reason with her, but she caught and saddled Cappy and rode away in an injured and unforgiving silence.

She let Cappy choose his own gait on the way to town; she was not at all anxious to see Flora or her friends; they had served only as an excuse to get to town and see what she could find out. She half hoped for another experience like the billiard table, anything that would give her another clue to the mysterious Thud.

But her trip proved uneventful and uninteresting. She stayed for luncheon with Flora and tried to enjoy the company of the other girls, but her mind was too occupied with speculating on the coming day. She saw Fritz on Main Street with four or five cowboys whom she did not recognize.

He bowed to her with more warmth than usually accompanied his greeting, and she put it down to the pricks of a guilty conscience.

That night at dinner the plans were not discussed, out of consideration for Aunt Tab. Mr.

Carey knew that the gentle old lady would be frightened and unhappy if she shared their news, so he very wisely kept it from her. Later in the evening when she had gone to bed they settled the last question on the front porch.

“Price and his boys will ride toward the Gulch in the morning and camp a couple of miles to the west,” Mr. Carey explained. “Bronson will meet Tom and Shoulders and Dicky here and ride up from this side. I’ll go over with the rest of the boys and wrangle the horses. Fritz’s outfit will meet us at our north boundary, then we’ll come back to the house and take the short cut to the Gulch if there’s anything doing.”

“Wonder what Fritz told Thud to have his horses there for?” Dicky asked, “and what’s old Fritz got to do with it anyway? It sure gets me.”

“Fritz has been in schemes before to get money without working for it,” Tom replied, “but I’d give a good deal to know what his game is myself.”

“Fritz is a German and these horses are going to the English Government,” Missy said suddenly.

The others looked at her in surprise.

“Shucks, that hasn’t anything to do with it,”

Sandy said at last, and the rest seemed to accept his word for it.

“I sure do hope Thud doesn’t show the white feather,” Shoulders remarked cheerfully. “I’ll be real disappointed if we don’t have a friendly little row.”

“Row, no such luck,” Ned lamented; “more than likely we’ll just go on a wild goose chase. There’s nothing much in what Missy heard. I’ve figured it out that maybe Thud has sold some of his horses to this Captain Forrest and he’s just going to join the party that’s wrangling our drove.”

The rest looked at him in scorn.

“Ned always throws cold water on a happy thought,” Shoulders remarked. “He just naturally hates to believe there’s a good time ahead.”

The telephone rang at this point and Missy went in to answer it.

“Hello,” they heard her say. “Yes, this is the Carey ranch; I’ll call my Father if you’ll hold the wire. What? Why, yes, I can take a message, but he’s right here. Oh, all right, yes, I heard you. I’m to tell him that Captain Forrest’s men will meet him at ten o’clock sharp at the north boundary. Very well, good-by.”

“Who was it,” Tom demanded; “Fritz?”

“No, it wasn’t Fritz talking to me,” Missy replied, “but he was telling the other man what to say. I heard him. When I said that I’d call Dad, he said, ‘Don’t let her do that,’ and later he said, ‘make it ten sharp.’ ”

“More mystery,” Shoulders chuckled. “I wish to-morrow was here. They certainly are clumsy the way they are handling their reins.”

“Ah, shucks,” Ned spoke from the corner of the porch. “I tell you, we’re all on the wrong track. I know there won’t be any fun to-morrow. You see they’ll have some slick excuse and we’ll feel like a package of monkeys. I’m going to bed,” he jumped down from the porch. “Anyway it’s going to rain to-morrow,” he predicted as he disappeared in the direction of the bunk house.

CHAPTER VIII

MISSY IS JUST IN TIME

NED'S prediction about the weather was true at any rate. Thursday dawned with a leaden sky and a fine, persistent drizzle.

Mr. Bronson, the county sheriff, rode up, soaking wet with great drops of rain dripping from the brim of his sombrero, but he was cheerful in spite of his damp condition, and hailed the rain as a blessing, maintaining that it would act as a cloak and help to keep their movements from attracting the attention of Thud and his men.

Mr. Carey and some of his boys rode out after breakfast to round up the horses, and Tom, with Shoulders and Dicky, left an hour later with the sheriff.

Missy watched them go with a feeling of rage and disappointment. The day stretched before her in an endless wait, with house work as the only means of making the time pass, and Aunt Tab as her only companion.

She made her bed, dusted, and would have

scrubbed the floor if the immaculate Chink had left even the shadow of dirt from his scrubbing of the day before.

By eleven o'clock everything was in shining order, and Missy sat down to compose a letter to Henri. But she was so restless that she could not write connectedly. She kept jumping up and going to the window.

"What's the matter with you, Missy?" Aunt Tab inquired. "You're so fidgety; why don't you sit down and read a bit?"

"Oh, I don't know," Missy replied. "I'm sick of the house. I do wish it would stop this eternal drizzling."

"Does make a body feel blue, doesn't it?" Aunt Tab agreed. "I always feel a little bit homesick for a smell of the sea on a day like this, but, land sakes, it's bound to rain sometime, and a body might as well just try and forget it."

"I suppose a body might," Missy said with a little laugh, "but all the same I wish it would clear."

She went back to her seat at the writing desk and tried to carry out Aunt Tab's placid philosophy, but there is a good deal of difference between sixteen and sixty-nine, especially when adventure is calling from just around the corner.

Missy gave up after dinner and announced that she was going out for a ride.

“Why, child, you’ll get drenched,” Aunt Tab objected.

“Never mind, I can put on dry things when I get in, and I’ll wear my rubber cape. Cappy loves the rain.”

Aunt Tab shook her head and permitted herself a sigh of resignation, but she did not offer further remonstrance. Sixteen years’ knowledge of Missy had taught her the uselessness of trying to make her change her mind once she made it up.

Missy went up to her room, hurried into her oldest khaki riding skirt and boots, pulled her hat well down over her head, snatched her rubber cape, and went out of the house, singing.

“Come on, Cappy; let’s go and see what we can scare up,” she whispered in the pony’s ear as she slipped on his bridle.

Cappy apparently agreed to the suggestion for his ears went up and he danced impatiently until she was in the saddle and had touched him ever so lightly with her spur.

Missy did not have any idea where she was going, but she headed the pony in the general direction of the Prices’ ranch. It was too early for the mail, but she had a hazy idea of riding

until she met the postman somewhere along his route. He would be some one to talk to, and anything was better than the tiresome waiting indoors.

Cappy loped along in the peculiar gait of the western pony that eats up the miles.

The rain had almost stopped, and a fine misty drizzle took its place. Missy rather enjoyed having it blown in her face.

When they reached the border line of their ranch Cappy turned south, but Missy wheeled him around and kept to the general direction. She was quite as at home, and quite as welcome, on the Prices' land as she was on her own.

"No you don't, Cappy," she chided, as the pony tried to get his own way. "Over there is the Gulch and you and I can't even look that way. I've thought it all out; we could go up to Flat Rock and have a little look of course, and equally, of course, it's mean and unreasonable of them not to let us in on the fun, but we're not going to do it. We'll stay over here where there's no chance of even seeing a stray rabbit."

Cappy obeyed, and for several miles they traveled along without even a change of gait. They were cutting diagonally across the end of the Price ranch. It was a stony, uneven bit of land

and made a poor pasture; few of the cattle even wandered there in their grazing. Missy knew that about two miles beyond—as the crow flies—they would strike an old road that was seldom used now. It ran parallel with the Price east boundary line for a few miles, and then lost itself in the plain beyond. In the other direction it joined the state road at a point beyond the mail boxes.

“Let’s make it, Cappy,” she said aloud to the pony. “You’re covering me with mud and I don’t like it. Never mind the draw; I know it’s a fright, but you won’t slip.”

A draw is a deep crevice in the earth, and this one was particularly steep. It looked as if a great piece of the earth had been thrown up, probably in the upheavals of by-gone ages, and it had left a hollow like a well in the middle of the rolling plain. There were many of them in the surrounding country, but none of them were quite as deep and difficult to pass.

Missy stopped her pony and considered before venturing down the path of sorts that led cross-wise to the bottom. A path went up the other side in like manner and came out on a broad plateau.

“Oh, come on, Cappy; we might as well have

some excitement," she exclaimed. "Let's go down." She urged the pony to the edge of the bank and then let him go his own way. He picked his steps gingerly, but with a sure-footed certainty, and reached the bottom safely.

"Good old fellow," Missy patted his neck. "Now scramble up the other side."

Cappy scrambled; it was steep, and little pieces of rock and dirt broke off from under his hoofs and went scuttling down the bottom as he struggled up, but he gained the top without a stumble and stood panting.

"Poor Cappy, that was sort of mean, wasn't it," Missy said remorsefully, "but it's all over now." Cappy paid no attention to her petting, his ears went forward, and he gave a startled little whinny.

Missy looked about her in surprise; she was out of the saddle in a second. It was an unfrequented part of the country and she was alert to the possibility of danger.

"Oh, Cappy, what have we gotten into?" she whispered, "surely it can't be a bear so near the road." She slipped the reins over the pony's head and left him to investigate.

A big rock fifty feet away offered a sort of lookout and she hurried to it. She was not really

frightened, but she encouraged the idea that a bear was prowling around in the vicinity. She looked about her and started again for the rock. Her foot hit something hard and she stumbled. She looked down. A big black-muzzled revolver lay in the mud.

It was a sudden change from the game of pretend to the real, and Missy trembled ever so little before she could collect her thoughts. She picked up the gun and looked at it. It was easy to see it had not been in its present place for long. She examined the chambers; one was empty.

The drip, drip of the rain and the wind in the aspen trees made a confusion of sounds, and she could distinguish nothing as she listened intently. With the gun in her belt she climbed gingerly up the rock. When she reached the top she lay down flat and crawled to the edge. She saw the old road forty feet below. She looked down; there was nothing directly beneath her, but farther along to the right she saw two men. They had evidently dismounted, for their horses were standing at the side of the road.

They were leaning over something; Missy could not discover what it was at first, but as her eyes became accustomed to the distance she saw that it was a limp form. The group was quite

a little way beyond her, but something in the way one of the men stood made her think it was Thud Sheldon.

“Oh, dear, what shall I do, something dreadful has happened,” she thought hurriedly, then she looked again at the two men; they were lifting up the body.

“If they ride away with him I’m lost,” Missy thought excitedly, but the men did not go toward their horses; instead one of them pointed in her direction.

Missy thought quickly. She led Cappy to the other side of the boulder, out of sight, and threw her cape over his head, then she stole softly along the ridge. The ground sloped down from the rock on both sides so that the ascent from the road farther on was very much less at that point.

Missy heard the men trudging up with their burden; they would be within sight in a minute—she looked hurriedly about—a clump of aspen growing half way down the bank caught her eye; their branches just showed above the ledge of the draw. She slid down the trunk of the largest one, trusting to the roots to hold her. She found a secure footing and kept her head just below the top of the bank. She was not a minute too soon for the men were in sight.

"I think he's dead," she heard one of them grumble, as the heavy foot-falls grew near. "What's the use of lugging him away up here?"

"He's not dead," the other voice denied; "he's only stunned. I can feel his heart beat."

Missy recognized the voice; she had been right in her guess. One of the men was Thud Sheldon.

They rested the body on the ground.

"Who is he anyway?" the first voice inquired.

Missy listened intently, then she grew cold with terror as Thud Sheldon answered,

"Shoulders Fielding of the Carey outfit. That's why I won't take any chances; dead men tell no tales. If we roll him down the draw he'll break every bone in his body, and if they find him they'll think he fell."

"Well, let's get it over with."

Missy heard, rather than saw, the two men pick up the body and approach the bank. Her hand tightened on the handle of the gun. There was a terrible pause, then the footsteps came nearer.

"Well, come on, just roll—"

Thud Sheldon's directions stopped abruptly, for a voice from the draw interrupted him with:

"Not to-day, Mr. Sheldon." And he found himself looking into the muzzle of Missy's gun.



“ ‘Not to-day, Mr. Sheldon.’ And he found himself looking into the muzzle of Missy’s gun.” *Page 89*

CHAPTER IX

THE HOLD UP

“PUT your hands up, please, both of you, and keep them up,” Missy directed as she climbed to the top of the bank and covered the two astonished men with her gun.

“Don’t shoot!” Thud Sheldon exclaimed nervously; “we’ll keep ’em up.”

A gun in the hand of a woman has often been known to cower the most courageous of men. She is so apt to be reckless with it and let it go off without notice, but there was no cause to be afraid of Missy; she was in complete control of herself and the situation. She sat down beside Shoulders and with her left hand managed to untie the handkerchief that he wore around his neck. She kept her eyes on the two men, however.

“You see I’m alone and you’re two to one,” she said calmly, “so if either of you make the slightest move I’ll be obliged to shoot.” Thud pretended innocence.

“Oh, we won’t move, Miss Carey, if you say so, but what’s the idea?” he asked. “We haven’t

been doing anything; we found your cow puncher half dead on the road down there and we thought we'd bring him up here and—and—"

"And throw him down the draw," Missy finished for him. "Yes, I heard all about it—'Dead men tell no tales'— Just ask your friend to put his hands up straight, they look foolish that way." The friend stiffened his arms at once, and growled angrily.

"What you going to do with us?"

Missy considered the subject in silence for a few minutes. "I haven't decided exactly. If Shoulders is only stunned he'll be coming around after a while. If he doesn't, why we'll just have to wait until somebody finds us."

"There's not much chance of that," Thud answered sullenly, "and little girls get sleepy and frightened when night comes," he added threateningly.

Missy forced herself to laugh quite naturally.

"I wouldn't try bullying if I were you, Mr. Thud Sheldon," she said.

"Well, what are you going to do when night does come?" Thud persisted.

"Reckon I'll find a way out," Missy replied confidently. "Maybe I'll try your plan. If the bottom of the draw was a good place for Shoul-

ders why wouldn't it be for you? If it gets late maybe I'll have to ask you just to roll yourselves down."

"Well, you can ask," Thud replied furiously. "If you think I'm going to let a kid with her hair down her back get the better of me you're mighty mistaken."

Missy pushed her gun a little nearer toward him.

"Keep still," she commanded shortly, "I don't want to hear another word from either of you, and keep your hands up higher." The men settled into gloomy silence, and the minutes wore on.

Missy thought rapidly. She knew Thud would try any means of throwing her off her guard, so that she was not surprised when a little later he suddenly exclaimed,

"Look!"

"I thought I told you to keep still," Missy replied calmly, never taking her eyes off the two pairs of hands. "You can't startle me, so don't try. If you say that again I'll shoot first and look afterwards," she added to be on the safe side.

There was another long silence and then Shoulders moved. Missy felt his body roll toward her, but she did not dare look at him.

“Shoulders,” she said sharply, “if you are conscious say something.” She felt the body move again, and then heard the grateful word,

“Missy.”

Shoulders sat up and rubbed his head. He had been badly stunned and his mind was confused. He looked down at his hand; it was limp, and he was conscious that it hurt him awfully. Then he heard Missy’s voice again,

“Try and come to, Shoulders, please. Can’t you remember? You must have fought with Thud Sheldon and rolled down the hill,” she said.

Shoulders looked dazedly about. He saw the two men for the first time and his mind cleared. He got to his feet and swayed uncertainly.

“How did you happen along, Missy?” he asked wonderingly.

“There’s no time to explain now. Sit still and tell me what happened to you,” Missy replied.

“Your hands a little higher, please, Mr. Sheldon, and your friend too,” she added as she saw Thud’s elbows bend ever so slightly.

Shoulders smiled in spite of the ache in his head and the sharp pains in his wrist. He sat down again before answering Missy.

“There must have been a mistake somewhere,” he began slowly as memory returned to him, “any

way here's what happened. We got to the Gulch and waited for hours. Your Dad and the rest of the boys joined us, and the Price outfit were on the other side, but nothing happened. We began to think you'd gotten the facts mixed so we divided and went out to find out where Thud was. I came along the pike, and just as I passed the beginning of this road I heard a noise, so I left Jinx and crawled up here to that rock yonder. There were two droves of horses in the road, ours and Thud's, and a bunch of men were rounding them up. Thud was right below me, and I made a noise and he looked up. We both fired at the same time. I missed him, worse luck." Shoulders cast a hateful glance at the smiling Thud and went on,

"He hit my right hand and I guess I dropped my gun. I'm a bit hazy about the rest; anyway I think I tried to get away and I stumbled, and that's about all, till just now."

"Well, I happened along just about right, didn't I?" Missy replied. "I found your gun, but there's no time to talk; Capp's over there behind that rock. You ride back and bring some of the boys over quick."

"What, leave you alone with these cattle thieves?" Shoulders demanded. "I guess not."

“Don’t be foolish; I’ve covered ’em till now when I thought you were dying beside me. Certainly you can’t hold a gun with that hand,” Missy reminded him. “You’ll have to go.”

Shoulders had to admit the sense of her argument.

“I’ll take their guns from them before I leave,” he said. “Here, you better keep ’em beside you.” He pulled the heavy revolvers from their holsters and handed them to Missy.

Then he found Cappy and mounted shakily. “I’ll send the first bunch I meet here, and then round up some to find out where the horses went to. Thud’s went to the Junction, that’s an easy guess, and I suppose ours are over being re-branded on his ranch.”

“How do you know?” Missy demanded, surprised.

“Oh, I saw ’em swap droves before I fired,” Shoulders explained. “Well, I’m off; don’t you blink an eye till I get back.” He wheeled Cappy around and started for the road at a breakneck speed.

The mystery was solved. Missy turned angrily to Thud. “You’re a nice sort of an American, aren’t you?” she demanded. “I never heard of such a low down, mean, underhand trick.

You'd steal our horses and let your mangy worthless, half-starved animals go in their place. That's why you've been so prosperous lately, is it? That's the trick you played on Mr. Price, I suppose. Oh, don't look so surprised, I heard you talking to Fritz about it the other night of the dance. I was under the billiard table."

Thud started violently. Fear was taking possession of him.

"Don't you move," Missy commanded, her righteous anger carrying her on. "I heard every word you both said. Did Fritz put the idea into your head? Tell me, hurry up, out with it!"

Thud shifted from one foot to the other.

"Will you let me go if I tell what I know?" he asked slyly.

"No I won't," Missy refused flatly. "But you tell me anyhow or it'll be the worse for you."

"Tell her, Thud," his companion said gloomily. "You might as well."

"Then Fritz did put me up to it," Thud answered sullenly. "He told me that Price's horses were better than mine and that if I'd keep still about it he'd arrange an exchange on the way to the Junction, because he knew the men that were wrangling the horses for the Englishmen, and they'd do what he told 'em. I held out at first

because I didn't see how I could keep it dark, but he told me that after awhile I could sell the horses to the Imperial German Government and make a big profit. He thought of having the dollar sign for a brand too, so that I could rebrand the horses when I got 'em. You can change almost any letter into a dollar sign," he said proudly. "It worked with Price's fine," he continued, "but I knew your Dad would get wind of it; I told Fritz so."

"Yes, I heard you," Missy said dryly. "Well, you should have stuck to your point; now you're in for it, and I hope they give you plenty of time to think over what you've done."

"Ah, it wasn't so awful," the other man protested feebly. "It ain't as bad as cattle stealing; Fritz said so."

"Not so bad! It's a thousand times worse," Missy exclaimed. "You've been helping the Germans, that's what you've been doing, and you'll be arrested as spies along with Fritz. Can't you see that he was sending over bad horses? Horses that were not worth the grain they ate to the English army, besides giving a dishonest name to the cattle men around here," Missy paused for breath. "Oh, but I'm glad I found you out," she said solemnly.

The men had nothing to say. They had food for thought and they were trying to digest it.

After a little time they heard a shot. It came from the road below. Missy picked up one of the guns and fired it with her left hand. The signal was answered by a shout from the road below, and almost immediately Tom appeared over the hill. He was followed by Dicky and Sandy. The horses were covered with lather and their faces were strained and white.

Sandy pulled his gun at sight of the two men, and Tom jumped from his saddle and ran to his sister.

“Missy, you’re all right!” he exclaimed, a dry sob in his voice.

Missy dropped her gun and stumbled into his arms. The reaction had come now that the strain was over. She found time to be afraid.

“Oh, Tommy,” she sobbed, “I’m so glad you’ve come, I’m so tired. I—I guess I’m only a girl after all.”

“You’re a little thoroughbred,” Tom said affectionately, and he held her tight in his arms.

CHAPTER X

MISSY RECEIVES CONGRATULATIONS

SHOULDERS lay on the sofa in the front sitting-room, as befitted the wounded hero, and Missy sat beside him.

It was Friday morning and the events of the day before had been untangled and explained as each of the chief actors told their part of the tale.

Missy's easily won the laurel wreath, for she had appeared at the critical moment, and but for her timely intervention the outcome might have been disastrous in the extreme.

"You saved my life, Missy," Shoulders said solemnly, as he peeked from under the wet cloth that Aunt Tab had insisted upon putting on his bruised head. "Think of it; if you hadn't been there, I might have been all busted up at the bottom of the draw."

"Ugh! Don't talk about it," Missy begged. "I turned cold when I heard them getting ready to roll you over. I wish Dad would come back and tell us what's happened. He's been gone an

age.” She got up and looked out of the window.

“Here comes Mr. Price and Pete,” she exclaimed. “They’ll know something.”

Mr. Price and Pete rode around to the corral, left their horses and tramped into the living-room by way of the kitchen.

“Missy, you wonderful girl, you!” Mr. Price wrung her hands heartily. “Come here and tell me all about it. Why, bless my soul, it’s the finest thing that’s happened in an age in this sleepy place. And to think of our little Missy just coolly holding up two full-sized men, not to mention saving your life, Shoulders! Lands sake’s alive, it’s extraordinary, simply extraordinary. Tell me all about it. When I think of those mangy coyotes of Thud Sheldon’s masquerading as my stock, I get so hopping mad.”

Mr. Price talked on excitedly without pausing for breath long enough to give Missy time to “tell him all about it,” as he insisted that she must, at frequent intervals.

“I’ve written a letter to that Englishman and explained, and I’m sending my horses that I got back this morning from Thud’s place, on to New York as a sort of peace offering.”

“Did Dad catch Captain Forrest by telegram?” Missy asked at last. “Do tell us what’s

going on. Shoulders and I are both dying of curiosity."

"You tell her, Pete; you've been in to town," Mr. Price replied. "I get so fighting mad when I think of it I don't do anything but sputter."

Pete grinned and winked mischievously at Missy. He had listened to those sputterings all the way over.

"Last thing I heard," he said, "was that Fritz was in jail with Thud and six of the cow punchers held on the charge of cattle stealing and about fifty other things. Bronson's enjoying it, I can tell you. Every once in awhile he thinks of some new names he can add, that fit the crime, and he goes and adds it to the charge."

"Where'd they find our horses?" Shoulders asked impatiently.

"Up in a corner of Thud's place; he'd built a nice little shed for the branding and everything was all ready. His outfit was some surprised when we rode up and interrupted their little game of poker. Guess they left you for dead, Shoulders," he grinned. "Anyway, you don't need to fret, the boys are driving the horses down to-day with ours."

"Tell us about Captain Forrest," Missy asked. "Did Dad catch him?"

“Yes, he hadn’t left the State; he’s down at a ranch south of here, and he’s coming back here to-morrow. He wired your Dad at the hotel. He’s got to come up and give his testimony.”

“I told you Fritz was a spy,” Missy said, “and you wouldn’t have it, you all said, ‘Shucks.’ ”

“Oh, that’s right, rub it in,” Shoulders teased; “of course you knew all the time, and of course you were right, but what I’d like to know is how you happened to ride over to the draw. Of all the unlikely places on a rainy day, that’s the worst fright of all.”

“I was looking for some excitement,” Missy replied.

Mr. Price shook his head, and the two boys agreed with his unspoken thought that the ways of girls are difficult to fathom.

“Well, you sure found what you were looking for then,” Pete said finally.

Aunt Tab entered the room; she was carrying a tray with a napkin over it, and she was walking on tiptoe. It was seldom that any of the boys on the ranch were sick enough to need her care and when they were she made the most of it.

“Lands sake! You mustn’t stay in here and get Shoulders all excited,” she exclaimed. “He’s got a fever and he must be quiet. I’ll

have to ask you all to go out on the porch," she declared quietly but so firmly that they all left without a word.

Two days later Captain Forrest and Allan Webb returned to the ranch. Missy was writing the long-delayed answer to Henri when they drove up in the automobile with her father and Tom.

She went out on the steps to meet them.

"How do you do, Captain," she said as Captain Forrest stepped out of the car first. "It's ever so nice to have you back with us."

"It's ever so nice to be back, Miss Carey," the Captain replied, bowing, "and it is an honor to shake the hand of such a splendid and plucky young lady. You must accept my sincere congratulations and my warmest thanks; you have rendered a very valuable service to your country and mine."

It was a long speech and the Captain held Missy's hand all the time he was talking.

She was so embarrassed, and yet so proud and happy, that two big tears rolled down her cheeks, and she did not even bother to wipe them away.

Captain Forrest turned to Mr. Carey. "You must be a very proud father," he said, smiling. "I almost envy you."

"Well, we do think it was a pretty risky thing

for a girl to do all by herself, but then that's natural we should," Mr. Carey replied quietly.

"I think you're a winner," Allan Webb said impulsively as he took Missy's hand and shook it, "and I don't think they're making half enough fuss about you."

"Nonsense, I didn't do anything I didn't have to do. I couldn't very well let them throw Shoulders over the bank before my very eyes, could I?" Missy asked, laughing, as she led the way to the sitting-room, much to the embarrassment of Shoulders who came in for his share of thanks and praise.

"I say, Miss Carey, if I get into my riding clothes do you think Jinx and Cappy would mind going for a little ride?" Allan asked after the greetings were all over and they were on the front porch together.

"Not if it's a very short one," Missy replied. "Cappy was pretty tired, but he's had a long rest so he's fit to ride. Hurry up and we'll go."

"Where to?" she inquired a few minutes later when they were both in the saddle.

"Why, let's go over and have a look at the draw," Allan suggested. "I'd like to view the scene of the battle, particularly in company with the heroine of the day."

They started in the direction of the Price ranch and Missy told him why she had chosen this way on the fatal evening.

She made Allan tell her all he knew about the great war. They rode slowly so that conversation was possible.

It was a glorious day. The big range of mountains rose majestic against the indigo blue of the sky, and the brilliant sunshine covered the plains and brought out the colors of the wild flowers.

They reached the draw in time, and Missy felt like a guide as she showed and explained the different spots that had been of such importance two days before.

"I think I'll take a leaf of that aspen tree and keep it," Allan said seriously. He was standing on the edge of the draw. "It certainly fulfilled a destiny when it decided to grow by the skin of its roots on that bank, didn't it?"

Missy laughed. "I thought so when I slid down into its comforting shelter," she replied.

It was late when they reached the home pasture.

On their return they had been silent for the greater part of the way for the ponies had galloped hard.

Suddenly Allan pulled Jinx into a walk.

"Say, Missy," he said suddenly, "are you ca-

pable of standing another shock?" he inquired.

"Yes, anything," Missy laughed in reply, "only don't be surprised if I don't act surprised. I feel as though nothing could really ever shock me again."

"Well, maybe this won't, but it did me when I heard it, and I'd been expecting it, and waiting for it for over a year," Allan said mysteriously.

"What is it? You're making me curious."

"Just this. The United States is going to declare war on Germany. Of course, we all knew it would come some day, but doesn't it give you a tiny little shock to think it's really about to happen?"

"When?"

"Within a day or two."

Missy's brain whirled as she tried to grasp the significance of the words.

The past week had been a busy one at the ranch and the papers had been neglected.

"Are you sure?" she asked presently.

"Positive, Captain Forrest heard semi-officially," Allan said. "I'm going back to-morrow."

"I suppose Tommy will go," Missy said slowly. "But, oh, Allan, I'm glad, glad, glad we've done it at last!"

CHAPTER XI

VOLUNTEERS

THE formal declaration of war that followed a few days after Allan Webb's prophecy to Missy had a complicated and varied effect on the Carey ranch. Most of the boys accepted the news with characteristic calm and decided to wait until the country called them, before going into the service. But Tom and Shoulders and several other men from the surrounding country, who were more venturesome, left one day for the city, fifty miles south, and returned in a week, "soldiers."

Missy, after the first few days of bewilderment and readjustment, plunged into a very whirlwind of activity. A Red Cross Unit was organized in Preacher's Corners, and because she was the heroine of the hour, she was elected head of the Junior Branch.

One morning, as she sat at the head of the long table that was piled high with gauze bandages, she counted the girls present, and found to her dismay that there were only seven.

The Red Cross headquarters were the front sitting-room of the Dodds' house on Main Street.

"What's the matter with everybody to-day?" she asked. "I never saw such sleepy, lazy people in all my life. Flora, I wish you'd wake up and look at that dressing you're making; it's all raw edges and fuzz."

Flora, whose thoughts had been elsewhere, returned to her work with a start.

"I was busy thinking of something, Missy," she explained, "and I sort of forgot what I was doing. These things are so pesky."

"What were you thinking of?" Grace Hollis asked. She was a friend of Missy's and lived on a ranch seven miles south of the town. She rode in three days a week with praiseworthy regularity.

"I was thinking of the boys going way over there to France with no one to really take care of them," Flora said sentimentally.

"Well, you'd better think of them over there wounded in a hospital with no dressings and no bandages," was Missy's practical reply.

"It's a perfect crime the way the girls around here won't come and work. We simply must do something about it."

"Oh, they'll come after this week, fast enough."

Grace laughed. "Just now, they're so excited over the boys that they can't settle down to anything."

"Which reminds me I have a scheme to offer," Missy announced. "The boys are going away next week and I think we ought to give them some kind of a send-off." She paused; the words acted as a stimulant on the rest of the girls.

"I think that's a wonderful idea. What shall we do?" Flora demanded.

"Why don't you have a dance?" Jessie Bangs suggested.

She was the only one of Flora's school friends who was still with her.

"Oh, the boys are tired of dancing," Grace protested. "Let's think of something new."

"Is that Mr. Webb coming back to your ranch, Miss Carey?" Jessie asked.

"No, indeed," Missy replied. "He's gone for good this time. He was an officer, you know, in the National Guard, so of course he had to hurry home as soon as this happened."

"Oh, gracious! do you think he'll go to France right away?"

"I don't know; he said he hoped he would; he's promised to bring me the Kaiser's sword as a souvenir," Missy laughed. "I hope he does."

“But that isn’t making plans for the send-off,” Flora objected. “Have you an idea, Missy?”

“Just the beginning of one. I thought maybe we could have a big, all-day picnic, with games and a riding contest. The boys all love that, you know, and we might have prizes.”

“Great! I think that’s the very thing,” Grace said enthusiastically, and the rest of the girls agreed.

“Now who will we ask?”

Missy considered for the length of time that it took her to make a dressing, then she said slowly:

“Well, I’ll tell you. I think it would be more fun to have a crowd, but then that wouldn’t be a regular special send-off to the boys who are going. I’ve counted up, and I think there are about twenty men from around here who have enlisted. Of course, we can ask some of the older men, like Mr. Price and Grace’s father and Dad; they’d have to help us out, but shall we ask the rest of the boys?”

“No,” several voices replied in chorus.

“Let’s just keep it for the soldiers. Now, how about the girls. We’ll all go of course, but we’re not half enough,” Grace said.

“I know it,” Missy admitted, “but I just nat-

urally hate to think of the girls that aren't doing a thing having all the fun."

The others agreed with her, but no one could offer any suggestion. It was not until the next day that Missy hit upon an idea.

She was out in the saddle barn talking to Ned when it came to her, and she hurried into the house to the telephone and called up Flora.

"Hello! Is that you, Flora?" she exclaimed when the answering hello came over the wire.

"This is Missy, and I've the greatest idea for the party; do listen, it's about the girls. I've thought up a joke we can play on them, and—what?—oh, all right, I won't tell you over the 'phone then. Who do you suppose it is listening? I'll tell you what to do. Get Grace to come in to your house this afternoon and I'll ride in right away, then we can talk about it. Yes, I'll come straight off. Good-by."

She hung up the receiver and looked out of the window just in time to see a sombrero bob down out of sight. Enough of it appeared again above the sill for her to know that the wearer was still hiding under the window. She tiptoed across the room and peeked out.

Ned was crouched under the window, pressed against the side of the house; his hat obstructed

his view so that he did not see Missy. She laughed softly to herself and very deftly pinched the crown of his hat between her fingers; then she waited.

Ned, who had obviously been playing eavesdropper, listened a few seconds longer and then started to go. He walked right away from his hat, which Missy held firmly; the surprise made him straighten up and he looked guiltily at her.

“Ha! ha! Mr. Ned, I’d like to know what you were trying to do?” she asked laughingly. “You’re as bad as the ostrich, when he puts his head in the sand he thinks no one can see him. Now don’t pretend you were weeding Aunt Tab’s flower bed,” she added, as Ned protested, “because I know you were listening to my conversation over the ’phone.”

“Oh, well, what if I was?” he answered sheepishly; “you’ve been so almighty mysterious lately, and we wanted to know what it was all about.”

“Oh, Ned, of all the Mister Curiosities, but you didn’t find out, did you?” Missy laughed.

“No, but just the same I’ve got my suspicions. You and Flora are getting up something, aren’t you, now?”

Missy rested her elbows on the window sill and

her chin in the palm of her hands. Her eyes danced mischievously as she answered seriously.

“Yes, we are, Ned, but it’s a secret, and I’ve promised faithfully not to tell.”

Ned wanted to pretend indifference, but his curiosity got the better of him.

“Oh, you needn’t tell me,” he replied, “but say, Missy, couldn’t you give me a little hint?”

“No, I don’t think I could, Ned, but if you asked some questions, and they weren’t too near, why I might answer them,” she teased.

“Well, has it got anything to do with the boys?”

“What boys?” Missy parried.

“Oh, us, and maybe the Price outfit.”

“Um—yes—some of them.”

“Only some of them?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“I can’t tell you that.”

“Well, are we going to get asked to something?”

“Oh, now you’re getting too hot,” Missy protested hurriedly.

Ned nodded his head wisely.

“Then that means we are,” he decided.

“Why do you say we?” Missy inquired. “I

said only *some* of the boys, but I've told you too much already, and I won't answer a single other question, so don't ask me."

She jumped lightly through the window and ran to the corral, and without another word saddled Cappy and started for town.

Ned watched her suspiciously. She had told him just enough to heighten his curiosity, and he determined to discover the rest. The sound of Aunt Tab's voice coming from the direction of the kitchen gave him an idea, and he went to her. She had just finished baking three good-sized pies, and their delicious smell diverted Ned's thoughts, but only for a moment.

"Say, Miss Tab," he said coaxingly, "do you know what Missy is up to?"

Miss Tab smiled knowingly. "Well, I do know part of the idea, Ned," she admitted.

"She and the other girls are getting up a dance, aren't they?" Ned hazarded, and Miss Tab fell into his trap.

"Land sakes!" she exclaimed, "I didn't know it was a dance; I thought it was going to be a picnic."

Ned secretly complimented himself on his strategy.

"Oh, well, I guess, now I come to think of it, it

was a picnic," he admitted. "Very select, I understand; just a few of the boys are going," he added.

"Yes, so Missy tells me; I think it would be nice to ask everybody, but the girls have decided they'll just have it special for the boys who are going away, and I don't know but maybe they're right after all. It's a nice friendly idea, giving them a sort of farewell and it's real sweet of them to think of it." Miss Tab paused and sniffed.

"I believe that's my bread burning," she exclaimed and hurried into the kitchen without realizing for a minute that she had given the whole secret away.

Ned watched her move busily around the kitchen.

"That's a nice way to treat a fellow," he grumbled to the placid Chink. "Keep him away from your picnic just because he isn't going to be a soldier. It's just like a lot of girls to make a fuss about a uniform."

He walked disconsolately to the bunk house and sat down on the edge of Shoulder's bunk.

An empty duffle bag in one corner of the room caught his attention, and he gazed at it thoughtfully for a long time.

In the meanwhile Missy had met Grace and Flora at the latter's house and they were busy discussing the plan.

"I think it's great!" Flora declared, "but explain it to me again, I don't think I quite get it."

"Why, it's perfectly simple and I know it will work like a charm," Missy replied. "We'll put up a sign in the post-office that will read something like this:

"'The Junior Branch of the Red Cross will give a send-off to the boys who have joined the Army,' and then the date below."

"I think this Saturday would be the best time, don't you?" Grace asked.

"It would for our boys, I know. Missy, you ask Mr. Price what he thinks," Flora suggested, "and then we can decide, but go on about the other sign."

"Yes, because that's the one that counts," Grace added.

"Well, I thought we'd word it something like this," Missy began:

" 'AN APPEAL FOR WORKERS.
OUR BOYS ARE GOING TO WAR.
DO YOUR BIT.'"

and then, under it we'll put—

“ ‘There is still room for more members in the Girls’ League. Apply to—’ and then our names, and of course, we’ll be careful to hang the signs near each other.”

“I wonder if it’ll work?” Grace laughed. “I suppose it will, all the girls will want to go to the picnic so they’ll just have to join the League.”

“You stop by and ask Mr. Judd to print the signs for us, Flora; six of each ought to do; we’ll put them in the station and the post-office and the store and the hotel, and nail them up on a tree at the cross-roads.”

“I’ll tell the boys down our way,” Grace offered, “and we can tell the rest of the girls at the meeting to-morrow. I can’t wait to see what happens.”

“Suppose all the girls join and work until the picnic comes off, and then stop?” Flora said as her two friends were leaving.

Grace looked puzzled, but Missy laughed.

“Don’t worry,” she said with determination; “leave that to me.”

“Where’s Ned?” she asked, two hours later, when she reached home a few minutes before supper.

Her father was at his desk, busy over some ac-

counts, and the boys were sitting on the front steps.

“He’s gone,” Tom answered her question. “Nobody knows where, but he’s gone.”

“Nonsense,” Missy replied, “where is he really, Dad?”

Mr. Carey looked up from his work and answered through the window.

“He’s just gone to the city. He asked me if he could have a couple of days off and I told him he could, so he went down on the five-twenty train; rode in with Tim. He’ll be back on Saturday. Why, what are you laughing at?” Mr. Carey stopped and looked in surprise at his daughter.

Missy’s amusement was seemingly out of all proportion to the news she had just heard.

CHAPTER XII

NED RETURNS

MR. PRICE was just leaving his corral when he saw Missy riding over the plains toward him.

He waved a welcoming hand and sat down on the fence to wait for her.

It was the day before the picnic, and the past week had been a busy one for the girls of Preacher's Corners. Missy's scheme to gather workers had the desired effect, and the membership of the Junior Branch of the Red Cross lengthened each day until there were twenty-six members enrolled.

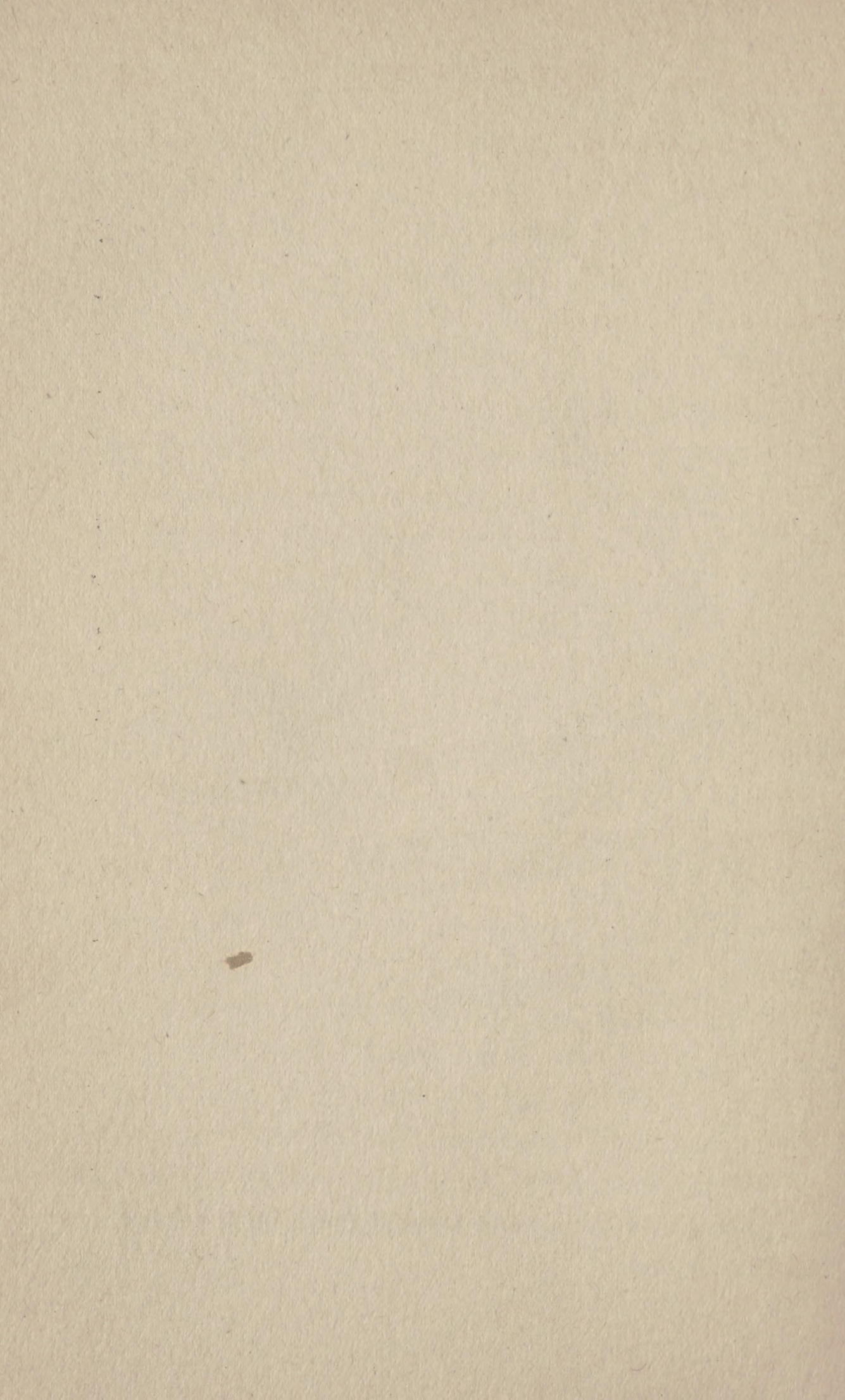
Plans for the picnic progressed. The new members took a hearty, though rather self-conscious interest in the preparations, and the donations of cakes and pies kept the luncheon committee, headed by Flora, very busy.

Missy and Grace had undertaken the management of the games, and it was to consult about the prizes that Missy was riding to the Price ranch.



“He waved a welcoming hand and sat down on the fence
to wait for her

Page 121



“Hello, what’s the matter?” Mr. Price called as she swung around the house and stopped Cappy just a few feet before him.

“I’m in a hurry, and I want your advice,” she replied breathlessly. “We’ve got ten dollars to spend in prizes, and we don’t know what to buy. Terrible fuss going on at Flora’s over it. Jessie Bangs, she’s that tenderfoot from the Coast,” Missy lingered over the adjective, “wants to buy a silver loving cup to present to the best rider. Now, Mr. Price, you know as well as I do that either Tom or Shoulders will win the bronco busting contest, and—well, can you imagine giving Shoulders a little silver loving cup? It’s too perfectly silly,” she said quite seriously.

Mr. Price threw back his head and laughed. The idea was indeed ridiculous.

“Oh, please be serious,” Missy protested; “it’s dreadfully important.”

Mr. Price managed to subdue everything but the twinkle in his eyes, as he answered gravely,

“Well, now, Missy, maybe you’re jumping at conclusions; maybe one of my boys will win. There’s Pete, for instance. Pete would just naturally dote on a little silver loving cup.”

Missy picked up her reins and pretended to start.

“All right, if you can’t be serious about it,” she said reproachfully.

Mr. Price was really penitent. “Come back, Missy; I was only teasing and you know it. I’ll be good, honest now; let’s hear what it’s all about.”

Missy turned back, dismounted, and climbed up on the fence beside him.

“I want you to decide what to have for prizes,” she explained, “then don’t you see I can go back and tell them what you’ve said and that will settle that silly Bangs girl and her loving cups.”

“Oh, I see,” Mr. Price said slowly. “Well, what’s your idea?”

“Promise not to laugh if I tell you?”

“Yes.”

“Then—it’s tobacco— Shoulders and all the boys’d like that best, I’m sure, and if they go away to camp maybe they’ll run short.”

“Now that’s funny, Missy,” Mr. Price exclaimed; “that’s exactly what I was going to suggest. My boys were all so anxious to chip in when you sent that last package off to Henri that I know they’d rather work for it as a prize than all the loving cups in creation.”

“Then that’s settled; here’s the money, you

buy two big tins of it, the same kind Tommy got for Henri," Missy replied.

She got down off the fence, caught the grazing Cappy, and jumped into the saddle.

"How will the rest of the girls like it?" Mr. Price asked. He was looking down at the money and trying not to smile.

"Not much," Missy admitted as she touched her pony with her spur, "but they won't know until this afternoon and then it'll be too late to do anything, see?"

Mr. Price whistled. "If that isn't Missy all over," he chuckled.

He watched until she was out of sight.

Missy galloped Cappy nearly all the way home. There was so much to be done that eating dinner seemed a waste of time, but she was hungry.

"Well, how's the master of ceremonies?" her father asked as she slipped into her place beside him at the table.

"All right, Daddy, but I've so many things to do."

"Better get Tom and Shoulders to help you," Dicky Barrows suggested. "The party's going to be for them, and I should think they'd be glad to rustle around for you."

“Dicky’s jealous,” Shoulders laughed. “Nobody’s asked him to a beautiful picnic. See what comes of being a brave soldier.”

Miss Tab, to whom the boys’ teasing was always a source of worry, spoke up,

“I’ve made an extra pie for you boys for your lunch to-morrow,” she said. “It seems a pity to think you’ll be left behind.”

Sandy and Dicky exchanged knowing glances.

“Oh, don’t you worry about us, Miss Tab,” Sandy replied, “we’ve made a few little plans of our own. But, of course, the pie’ll be welcome.”

It was on the tip of Missy’s tongue to ask what the plans were, but the sound of the automobile at the door saved her from displaying her curiosity.

“Anything left for us?” Tim inquired from the door. Ned was with him and they looked hot and dusty from their trip.

“Oh, hello, Ned!” Missy exclaimed. “Come and tell us where you’ve been.”

“Don’t ask embarrassing questions, Missy,” Tim said severely. “Ned’s had a disappointment and he’s feeling touchy about it.”

“I’m not either,” Ned returned hotly. “I can’t help it, can I?”

“Of course you can’t, that’s what I’m trying to

explain to Missy," Tim replied soothingly. "We can't any of us help our natural defects."

"Can't you leave a fellow alone? I suppose you'll pester me till I tell them everything," Ned continued dejectedly.

"Now I call that real unkind," Tim protested.

"Well, everybody listen—here's what happened— I went down to town and tried to offer myself to fight for my country. I was hovering under the delusion that Uncle Sam was out looking for recruits. After I stood in line before the recruiting office along with a mob of others for a couple of hours, I gave up the idea, but I stuck to my place and at last I got in. Well, I gave my name and age and occupation and a lot of other information, and the officer gave me a card and sent me to another address. Well, I got there and after another wait I got into a doctor's office and—say, Mr. Carey," Ned suddenly interrupted his story, "is there anything that you can see that's wrong with my constitution?"

"Why, no, Ned, you look pretty fit to me," Mr. Carey laughed. "What's happened?"

"What's happened?" Ned repeated in an aggrieved voice. "He turned me down, said I was unfit for the service because—because, I had flat feet."

A roar of laughter followed the announcement, and Ned, after an accusing glance at each of his convulsed companions, returned to his dinner in injured silence.

Missy waited until she was alone with him before she offered any consolation.

“I’m awfully sorry, Ned, really I am,” she said. “It was fine of you to go anyway, and I think the doctor was crazy to refuse you just for flat feet. But anyway, you’ve done your part and it isn’t your fault that you aren’t going with the rest. We’ll expect you to go to the picnic tomorrow, anyway.”

Ned brushed the side of his chaps with his hat, and looked sheepishly at the floor of the porch.

“Ah, shucks, I don’t care anything about the picnic,” he said gruffly, “but of course, if you really want me to, I’ll go.”

CHAPTER XIII

THE PICNIC

AT six o'clock on Saturday morning Miss Tab rapped gently on Missy's door.

"It's time to get up, dear," she called.

Missy struggled hard against the temptation not to bury her head deep in under the bed clothes for a last forty winks.

"What kind of a day is it?" she asked sleepily, her eyes still tightly shut.

"Beautiful, dear; clear, and nice and cool; come hurry and get dressed."

Missy sat up in bed and opened her eyes; a ray of sunshine slanted through the windows and made a patch of yellow on the bare floor. Outside the birds argued shrilly over some contested prize, probably a fat and venturesome worm.

It was an ideal setting for a picnic, and Missy, once she had shaken off her drowsiness, made short work of the dressing.

The telephone rang before she had finished her breakfast; it was Mr. Price.

“I got those things we were talking about, Missy,” he said, “and I’ll take them over with us.”

“Oh, thank you ever so much. Don’t forget them, will you?”

“I should say not. How about the girls; are they awfully cross at me?”

“No, I persuaded them to agree with us and they are all delighted. That is, all except Jessie Bangs, and she doesn’t really count.”

Mr. Price chuckled. “I was just a little mite worried,” he admitted. “Well, good-by, Missy; we’ll ride over about eight o’clock and meet you all.”

“Mind you’re not late; you know we have to get things ready for the rest.”

“Oh, we’ll be there.”

“Good-by.”

“Good-by.”

Missy hurried out to the kitchen where she found Aunt Tab secretly admiring her row of pies.

“They’re beauties, Aunt Tab. I hate to think of their being eaten. You and Dad will have to be awfully careful to carry them out without breaking them.”

“We’re going in the automobile, aren’t we?”

Miss Tab inquired. "Your father said so at breakfast; he can't leave before noon."

"Oh, well, that will be time enough; we won't have the games until after lunch. We're going to have the riding contest this morning, and you know you hate that."

"Are you going to ride, Missy?" Miss Tab asked nervously. "I do wish you wouldn't."

Missy laughed reassuringly.

"Why, it wouldn't be a real picnic unless I tried for some sort of a prize. Don't you worry about me. Mr. Price says the bronco isn't half wild anyway."

Miss Tab shook her head doubtfully, but before she could say anything more Missy was out at the corral.

Sandy Morgan was standing at the door of the saddle barn, arrayed in a blue-and-white check shirt, and a new yellow neckerchief. He shifted self-consciously from one foot to the other when he saw Missy, and took off his hat and made her a formal bow.

"Mercy, Sandy, but you do look magnificent. When did you get that new handkerchief?" she exclaimed in surprise.

"I bought it the last time I was in town. Like it?" Sandy replied with fine indifference.

“Of course, it’s beautiful, but why are you all dressed up to-day?” Missy asked.

“Oh, I’ve a little engagement, and I thought I’d kind of spruce up a bit.”

“Why, where are you going?”

“Don’t you tell, Sandy.” Dicky Barrows appeared from around the corner of the bunk house. He was equally resplendent in a red-and-white check shirt and a green neckerchief.

Missy looked from one to the other in ill-concealed astonishment.

“Well, I never!” she exclaimed. “Are you really going somewhere or are you just teasing me?”

“Oh, we’re going somewhere,” Dicky replied, “but where, is our little secret.”

“You’d better get started, Missy,” Sandy suggested, “or you’ll be late for the picnic.”

Missy hesitated, but only for a moment. “I guess you’re right, Sandy,” she laughed, getting the better of her curiosity and not giving him the satisfaction of asking any further questions.

“I’d ask one of you to get Cappy for me but I’d hate to have you muss up your pretty clothes.”

“Oh, I’ll be glad to get him for you,” Dicky offered, and started for the pasture.

Missy called Tom and Shoulders, and Ned rode in from the pasture on Jinx, driving Ranger and Skittles before him.

After the horses were saddled the picnic party started. Missy could not help looking back wonderingly at Dicky and Sandy in their gala attire.

“I wonder what they’re up to?” she said to Tom.

“Oh, nothing much; they’re just trying to make you curious,” he answered. “I expect they’ll ride in to town and hang around the hotel.”

But Missy’s curiosity was not satisfied by so simple an explanation.

At the cross-roads they found Mr. Price and five of his boys waiting for them. They were laden down with provisions, and Pete was leading a solemn-eyed, piebald pony named Stars. He was the cherished property of the Price ranch and was renowned throughout the countryside for having thrown more men than any other single pony.

The place that had been selected for the picnic was a good two hours’ ride from their meeting place. It was a clearing high up in the foothills—a flat stretch of land shaded by a giant rock, with a trout stream near at hand. A little to the

right and down the trail a way there was a natural amphitheater that served as a ring for the riding contest.

"I'd 'most forgotten how nice it was," Missy exclaimed as she dismounted and prepared to unsaddle Cappy.

"It's the best spot for a picnic in this part of the country," Mr. Price declared, looking about him with appreciation.

"I'm glad you chose it for our last one," Shoulders said a little sorrowfully. "It'll be nice to remember it when we're 'over there.'"

"Shoulders, for pity sake, don't talk as if this were going to be your last picnic on earth," Missy protested, "and don't sit down on that rock, because you've got to work. Somebody has to build the fire and somebody has to go and catch some fish."

"I'll stay here and fix the fire," Pete offered, "if Shoulders will gather the wood."

"I'm agreeable, but if I know Missy she'll build the fire and we'll both get the wood," Shoulders replied.

The rest of the boys, with Tom and Mr. Price, went off in the direction of the stream, and Missy rolled up her sleeves with business-like care.

“Where’s the wind coming from, Pete?” she asked.

“West, I guess; feels that way,” he replied. “Going to build a fire screen?”

“Think we’d better, don’t you? If we don’t the smoke will blow in everybody’s eyes.”

They set to work busily. The boys brought pieces of wood of all sizes and shapes, and Missy, with a knack that comes from long experience, laid a fire. Pete and Shoulders put up a fire screen.

“Very neat, Missy,” Shoulders congratulated, as Missy declared the fire would burn in a blizzard. “You really ought to have been a man.”

“Shoulders Fielding, if you say that to me again—I’ll—I’ll throw every one of Aunt Tab’s pies—” A long-drawn shout interrupted her threat, and Grace on a wiry little sorrel pony came in sight far down the trail.

“Here they come; just look at them!” Pete exclaimed.

“I didn’t know Slim Chester had enlisted.”

“Hello, Slim!” Shoulders called.

Slim was one of the Hollis cowboys, and a general favorite at dances and picnics.

“Hello, Shoulders! here early, I see. Glad we brought the food with us.”

“There’s Baxter and Little John. Hello!”

“Hello, everybody.”

“We passed Flora and the hampers on the way; they’d had a blow-out, but they’ll be along in a little while,” Grace explained.

“When’s your mother coming?” Missy asked.

“Later on with the rest of the older people. I met your father in town and he said he was bringing Miss Tab later.”

“That’s a pretty nice fire. Who built it?” Slim inquired.

“I did,” Missy replied proudly. “Now, Slim, don’t you tell me I ought to have been a boy,” she warned.

“No fear, I like you too well as a girl,” he answered gallantly, and Missy looked triumphantly at Shoulders.

“Ah, Slim always did know how to talk pretty,” he said scornfully, and Slim laughed.

“It’s the only way to get along with the girls. Grace taught me; ask her.”

Grace looked up from the hamper she was unpacking.

“I’ve no time to answer foolish questions,” she said, and Shoulders laughed.

“Doesn’t always work, does it?”

“Not always, no; but mostly it does,” Slim an-

swered cheerfully. "Come on down and help carry up the hampers."

More people were arriving, and for a little while there was a confusion of greetings and welcoming shouts.

The girls unpacked the hampers and piled the plates on the rock out of harm's way, and the fishermen returned with a string of trout, which they left in the baskets for the older people to prepare.

At eleven o'clock Missy blew a big horn and announced that the riding contest would begin.

Pete roped Stars and brought him to the ring. Mr. Price acted as master of ceremonies.

"Who's first, the ladies or the men, Missy?" he asked.

"Oh, the men," she replied, but several voices protested.

"No, make the girls go first."

Pete led the protesting Stars out of the way, and Slim and Shoulders saddled a shaggy little mustang with fiery eyes and a mean way of throwing his head.

"Gentle as a lamb and warranted safe for any lady to ride," Slim announced as the pony planted his four little hoofs in the dirt, and refused to move.

“Who’s first?”

Mr. Price lined up the girls who had entered for the contest and selected Flora by the simple method of *eni-mene-mini-mo*.

“Oh, land, I always am unlucky,” Flora protested, “but I’ll chance it. Hold on, though, ’till I get a good seat.”

She stepped into the ring and scrambled into the saddle while Slim and Shoulders held the pony.

“Let her go,” Slim directed. “Hang on, Flora.”

The mustang stood still long enough for Flora to think she had gotten a firm seat; then as if to show her the foolishness of such rash confidence he dropped his head almost to the ground and kicked his hind legs into the air. Flora rolled right over and turned a somersault on the soft ground.

Her audience waited long enough to see that she was not hurt and then broke into peals of laughter.

Flora picked herself up and joined in the merriment.

“Who’s next?” Mr. Price asked when the laughter had died down.

Several girls followed, but their attempts were

as unsuccessful as Flora's, and few of them were of any longer duration.

"Come on, Grace; you're next," Mr. Price called, as the fifth girl picked herself up and limped out of the ring.

"Let's see what you can do."

"Remember the honor of the Hollis ranch," Slim whispered, as Grace jumped into the saddle, "and hang on."

The pony had worked himself into a towering rage by now and it was evident by the quick lunge that he made as soon as Shoulders let go of his bridle that he intended to make short work of his new rider, but Grace refused to be thrown. She sat firm in the saddle and let him buck and rear.

The boys cheered lustily, and Mr. Price got out his stop-watch. Five minutes was the permitted time that the rider must stay in the saddle, and Grace stayed.

"Three cheers!" Slim shouted joyfully, as he helped her off. "I knew you'd do it; I guess the prize is yours."

"Hold on, Missy's next," Mr. Price said; "so don't be too sure."

"Come on, Missy, he's ready for you," he called.

Missy smiled at Grace as she passed. "Think I can do it?" she whispered.

Grace nodded. "Easy," she replied.

Missy jumped into the saddle with her usual agility, and Shoulders eyed her seriously.

"You've just naturally got to stick to this horse, Missy Carey," he said firmly. "There—let her go."

Once more the mustang tried to throw off his new rider, and once again she refused to be thrown. He kicked and ran, only to stop suddenly with lowered head. Missy was ready for him and stayed in the saddle.

The crowd cheered, and Shoulders thumped Slim on the back in the extremity of his delight.

At last the five minutes were up. It looked like a tie. Only Mr. Price and a few of the boys knew that Missy had kept her seat with more ease than Grace.

"What will we do about the prize?" Mr. Price inquired.

"But there isn't one, is there?" Grace and Missy asked together.

"Of course there is; the boys are putting it up, and it's a beauty," Mr. Price replied.

"I tell you, let's wait until the boys have ridden Stars," Grace suggested, "and then Missy and I

can see which one can stick on him longest.”

“Great!” Missy agreed. “I’ve always been crazy to ride that horse, and that will be perfectly fair.”

Mr. Price considered for a little while, but his pride in Missy finally made him consent.

Pete brought back Stars, and the men’s contest began.

Missy saw the mustang throw Ned first and then Baxter.

“It looks as if we’re in for it, doesn’t it?” she said to Grace. Grace pretended to shake with fear.

“I hope they tire him out a little,” she whispered.

Stars did not strike the casual onlookers as a very suitable name for the piebald mustang that was hurtling around the ring and succeeding in unseating some of the best riders of the day. But the nickname derived its origin from the year before, when a man from the East who prided himself on his riding had attempted to ride this special pony. He had been pitched ruthlessly to the ground after a few strenuous seconds, and the first word he had uttered when he partly regained consciousness was “Stars—Stars,” and the little bronco had been Stars ever since.

He was proving his right to the name now, and Missy was growing impatient.

“Why don’t they let one of the boys who really can ride have a chance?” she said crossly. “I’m sure Tommy could stay on.”

“Are you determined to keep all the glory of to-day for the Carey ranch?” Grace laughed. “How about Slim or Little John, or even Pete? they haven’t had a try yet.”

“Oh, well, I meant them when I spoke. I just said Tommy because he’s my brother, I suppose.”

“Well, there’s his chance. Look!”

Tom was walking over to the pony with long, confident strides. He jumped into the saddle, and at first it did look as though he were going to stick on, but Stars, in a very frenzy of rage, jumped sideways like a frightened rabbit, and then reared and fell. Tom managed to get his foot out of the stirrup in time to save its being crushed, and so escaped serious injury.

Stars was up in a minute and his fall seemed to have added to his obstreperousness.

“Too bad, Tom,” Mr. Price said feelingly; “that was a good start, but—”

“Oh, I know,” Tom laughed, “some day I’ll work that pony over until he’s a house pet, you see if I don’t.”

Slim was the next in line and he stayed on for nine minutes out of the ten.

"I knew he would," Grace cried excitedly; "if you hadn't, Slim, I'd never have forgiven you."

"Well, don't forget that extra minute," Slim reminded her. "I haven't won yet."

"Oh, nobody will stay any longer than that," Grace replied confidently.

Pete winked at Missy.

"Watch me," he said grandly. He ran over to the bronco, put both hands on the saddle, and vaulted. It was a clever piece of acting and the crowd cheered. The minutes wore on and he kept his seat in spite of Stars' bucking, but the temptation to show off was too strong. He raised his hat and was going to wave it when Stars bucked, jumped into the air and landed with his head down and his four feet together.

Pete, taken more or less off his guard, grabbed for the pommel of the saddle and was disqualified for "pulling leather."

"Come on, Shoulders; you're the last one," Mr. Price called. "So far, Slim's got a big start on all of you."

Shoulders threw away the cigarette he was smoking and ambled out toward the pony. Missy

watched him excitedly. As he passed her she called out, "Good luck."

The onlookers roused themselves in eager anticipation. Shoulders would not give up without a fight.

He mounted quickly but very easily, so that Stars was surprised to find there was any one in the saddle. He threw his head back and started to run. Shoulders reined him in and made him go round in circles.

It was a spectacular fight between man and beast, and the boys showed their appreciation by long-drawn shouts that did much to egg on the already frantic Stars.

There was only one minute when it looked as if the pony would win. He bucked so hard and so fast that it seemed almost impossible that any man could keep his seat.

Missy was so excited that she called out as they passed:

"Shoulders, if you dare to let that pony throw you I'll never, never—save your life again."

The threat had the desired effect. Shoulders stiffened in the saddle and grinned, and at the end of ten minutes he made the now subdued Stars walk the length of the ring, while the boys cheered lustily.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SURPRISE PARTY

SHOULDERS dismounted and the boys surrounded him. Mr. Price sent Pete for one of the tins of tobacco, and Shoulders proved that Missy was correct in her choice of a prize by his genuine enthusiasm over it.

“What happens next?” Little John inquired as he helped himself to some of the prize.

Mr. Price looked at Missy and Missy looked at Grace.

“We’re ready,” they replied.

“You’re never going to let those two girls ride Stars,” Pete protested; “he’ll kill ’em both.”

Tom looked a little worried too.

“I don’t honestly think—” he began, but Missy interrupted him.

“Never mind what you think, Tommy. Grace and I have to settle this somehow.”

“Oh, you needn’t worry,” Shoulders said to Tom, “Stars is pretty tired and we can be right there.”

“Who’s first?” Grace asked.

"I ought to be," Missy replied, "because you were last time, and that's only fair."

"All right, Missy; you go ahead," Mr. Price called; "just stick on for as long as you can."

"Give him his head and act sort of easy," Shoulders advised her as she mounted, "and let him have his own way."

Missy did her best, but Stars resented the flap of her riding skirt and acted badly. She clung on in spite of him, however, until Tom and Shoulders made her get off.

Grace did not fare so well. She was just the least bit nervous, and though she made a brave attempt Stars felt the uncertainty of her hand on the reins. His temper was sorely tried too by the second riding skirt. He plunged and reared so furiously that Grace lost one of her stirrups, and had it not been for Slim's and Tom's quick action in catching the pony she might have had an ugly fall.

The prize beyond a doubt fell to Missy, and Mr. Price gave it to her with all the grace of a lord mayor offering the keys of the city to a visiting queen.

She accepted it with equal gravity. It was a small box and she opened it eagerly, to find a little gold horse mounted on a stick pin.

“Why, how perfectly lovely!” she exclaimed. “I never suspected anything like this; isn’t it a beauty?”

“You deserve it, Missy,” Mr. Price declared proudly. The pin was his own contribution, although he pretended that the boys had a share in the buying of it.

Every one crowded around to examine and enthuse over it, and even Jessie Bangs had to admit that Missy had earned it fairly.

It was Shoulders who finally suggested returning to camp for dinner, and the rest heartily agreed to the proposal.

They found everything in readiness for them. The older people had arrived and had laid out the table cloths on the ground, and unpacked the food while they were away. It made an exceedingly tempting display.

Miss Tab was just putting a sandwich on a plate when she saw Missy escorted by the proud Tom and Shoulders.

She forgot about the sandwich as she turned to greet them.

“Well, well, dearie, I am glad to see you alive. Every time I heard the boys yell I was sure some one of you was hurt.”

“No, indeed, Auntie, we had a fine time and I

won the prize,"—Missy displayed her pin. "Isn't it a beauty?"

"Very pretty, my dear, very pretty," Aunt Tab admitted, "but don't tell me anything about the riding; I really don't want to hear; it upsets me completely." She turned to her plate, but the sandwich had disappeared. A little way off a "camp robber" was struggling with it. He was a big bird about the size of a robin, and with no manners at all.

"Land's sake!" Miss Tab exclaimed as she saw him. "I never will get used to those saucy birds; they're as bold as they can be; a body can't put a thing down for a second without their running off with it."

"Never mind," Shoulders comforted; "he didn't get the pies anyway, so it doesn't matter much."

"Sit down, everybody," Mrs. Dodd called. "The fish will be finished in no time, and they mustn't be allowed to get cold."

There was a general scramble for places. Slim chose Grace for his companion, and they joined Missy and Shoulders, who were already sitting with their backs up against the rock, with Tom and Flora.

"Oh, Jimminy, smell those fish!" Slim said,

sniffing the air rapturously. "I'm ready for them too."

"So am I," Shoulders exclaimed; "working Stars over isn't the gentlest job I ever tackled."

"Flora," Tom said softly, "did you make the ginger bread over in that basket?"

"Yes, and the biscuits too," Flora replied. "Why?"

"Well—say, Flora, you like me pretty much, don't you?" Tom asked, irrespective of the ginger bread.

"Why, yes, Tommy; lots."

"Well, then you'll miss me when I'm away at camp, won't you?"

"Of course, I will."

"And you'll be kind of sorry to think of me being hungry, and maybe you'll—"

"Oh, I see," Flora laughed; "all this means you want me to promise to send you ginger cake."

"Will you?"

"Yes, indeed, I'll send a box to you-all every week."

"'You-all,' did you hear, Tommy?" Shoulders asked. "All includes me, and I love ginger bread."

"Look!" Missy exclaimed suddenly, jumping up. "I saw a face behind that bush."

“Where?” the rest demanded, but Missy could not point out the exact spot. They laughed at her fears, but she still insisted she had seen some one.

“Missy’s so excited over that prize she just won, she’s seeing things,” Slim laughed.

“Face in the bushes, ho! ho!”

“What’s the matter?” Ned inquired, coming up and making a place for himself beside Missy, much to the disgust of Shoulders.

“I thought those fish were most done,” he grumbled; “seems to me everybody at the other end’s getting served first. Most likely there won’t be enough to go ’round.”

“Then you can go and catch some more,” Flora suggested sweetly. “There’s plenty left in the stream.”

“Ned can’t walk that far,” Shoulders said gravely; “haven’t you heard?”

“Why, no, what’s the matter with him?” Flora and Grace asked quite naturally.

“Why, he’s suffering from flat feet,” Shoulders explained; “a very serious thing it is too. The doctors won’t let him in the army on account of it.”

“Ah, shucks, Shoulders, you always tell everything you know,” Ned growled. “I’ll get in the

army yet, see if I don't. You don't need feet to fight with."

"Oh, yes, you do," Slim protested; "how are you going to run away from the Germans if your feet aren't just right?"

"Who said anything about running away?" Ned demanded. "I bet I could kill a dozen Germans and never—" but the boast froze on his lips.

A blood curdling whoop rent the air, followed by a dozen shots, and before any of the astonished people around the table could collect their thoughts twenty yelling cowboys appeared from nowhere and looted every bit of food in sight.

The rest rallied under the leadership of Tom and organized a hasty defense around the unopened hampers.

Then for a while the fun was fast and furious.

Missy saw Shoulders and Dicky wrestling over a piece of pie, and while they were contesting a "camp robber" ran off with it.

Pete discovered Sandy just in time as he was disappearing behind a rock with a chocolate cake, and dragged him back.

Flora's ginger bread was in danger of utter destruction, but Tom made a valiant stand, and with Slim's aid rescued it. After a while they

quieted down a little and Sandy Morgan came over to Missy, a piece of pie in one hand, and a ham sandwich in the other, and explained,

“You see, we just naturally couldn’t let you get ahead of us; if we’d let this party go on without us it would have been a precedent, and that never would do, see?”

“Besides,” Dicky added, “we knew you really wanted us.”

“And we knew we wanted the pie,” one of the Price boys said.

“Well, I’m real glad you came, boys,” Miss Tab replied; “there’s more than enough to go around and I always felt it was mean to leave you out.”

“I believe Miss Tab knew what was going to happen,” Mrs. Dodd laughed; “she wasn’t a bit scared, and I nearly died of fright. Sit down, boys, and we’ll see what’s left,” she directed.

That picnic was a never-to-be-forgotten meal, and though the number of the diners had been doubled there was plenty to go around.

“I am glad you came, Sandy,” Missy laughed; “it was sort of queer without you-all, and now I know the reason for all the new clothes.”

“You were some curious, weren’t you?” Sandy inquired. “Dicky and I knew you were just

aching to ask some more questions before you left."

"I was," Missy admitted, "but I tried not to show it."

"Somebody pass me Flora's ginger bread," Tom called; "she made it for me, didn't you, Flora?"

Flora, who was very partial to Missy's handsome brother, smiled self-consciously and blushed a little.

"Reckon I did, Tommy," she replied.

"Has everybody had enough to eat?" Mr. Carey inquired. "It's time we were starting the games."

The rest of the afternoon was taken up by roping contests and obstacle races.

The honors were about equally divided.

Slim Chester won the prize for his clever handling of the lasso, and, as Grace said, "saved the honor of the Hollis ranch."

They stayed for supper and did not start for home until after seven. It was dark and the stars were out before the various parties separated.

"It's been a great old party," Pete said sincerely. "I tell you what, Missy, you're a wonder."

“Three cheers for Missy Carey,” Little John shouted, and the boys gave them, rousing cheers that were accompanied by shots.

Missy stood up in her stirrups and bowed.

“Thank you, boys, only it really wasn’t my picnic.”

“Oh, yes, it was,” Grace reminded her. “You thought of the idea.”

“Well, it’s been a great success,” Slim declared, “and you can bet we’ll never forget it.”

“Remember your promise about the ginger bread, Flora,” Tom called as the Carey party turned up their road.

“Oh, I will, sure. Good-night,” Flora called back.

“Good night, Mr. Price.”

“Good night, Missy, I’m proud of you.”

“Well, it has been a nice day, hasn’t it?” Missy said as the sound of the other horses’ hoofs grew faint in the distance, and she was alone on the home trail with her own boys, “but it’s dreadful the way you tease Flora, Tommy; you ought to be ashamed.”

“Oh, she likes it, doesn’t she Shoulders?” Tom asked, laughing.

“Sure she does.”

“I didn’t get any of Miss Tab’s pound cake,”

Ned grumbled, but no one paid any attention to him.

They were all quiet under the spell of the stars. At last Shoulders pulled Ranger a little closer.

“Say,” he said softly, “I wouldn’t belong to any other outfit around here for anything.”

“Why not?” Tom asked.

Shoulders hesitated.

“Aw, shucks, wait till Missy isn’t listening,” he replied, “and I’ll tell you.”

Tom laughed.

“She is a pretty good kid, isn’t she?” he asked affectionately.

Shoulders urged Ranger into a gallop.

“She sure is; too bad she isn’t a boy,” he called back as he dashed into the darkness ahead.

Missy touched Cappy with her spurs and raced after him all the way to the ranch house.

CHAPTER XV

TWO LETTERS

THE Main Street of Preacher's Corners was festooned with flags and yards of of bunting. Every store was decorated to outshine its neighbor, and a general holiday air prevaded the little town.

Missy and Grace stood on the steps of the general store, and looked expectantly up the street.

"It's really time they were getting started, isn't it?" Grace inquired.

"Well, it is, if they expect to have any time at the station," Missy replied, "but I suppose dinner is taking longer than they expected."

"I hope the band is on time; it will be awful if they're late."

"Oh, they will be. Mr. Bronson gave them all kinds of directions, and he was so serious that I think they'll be afraid not to come."

"Have you decorated your car? I've put so many flags on ours that Tim says he can't run it."

“Oh, yes, you’d never know it.”

“Let’s sit down,” Missy suggested; “it’s awfully hot.”

They sat down on the step of the store porch and watched the doors of the hotel in silence.

Presently Grace said softly,

“It’s going to be sort of queer without the boys, isn’t it?”

“I should say so,” Missy replied feelingly, “and isn’t it always the way? It’s our very nicest ones that are going; take Slim, for instance, how are you ever going to get along without him at the ranch?”

Grace gave a queer little laugh.

“Oh, the ranch can get along all right, but I’m not so sure that I can,” she said.

“So that’s it, is it?” Missy exclaimed, surprised, but Grace refused to say any more.

“You’ll miss Tommy and Shoulders dreadfully, won’t you?” she asked.

“Indeed, I will; why, when I think of going on day after day without them I just can’t bear it,” Missy replied. “Of course I’m fond of the rest too, but they’re not like Tommy and Shoulders.”

“Here comes Flora; what do you suppose she is carrying?” Grace said.

“Hello, Flora; come on over here with us,” she called; “they haven’t finished dinner yet.”

She pointed to the hotel. The citizens of Preacher’s Corners were giving a farewell dinner to the men who had enlisted. They were going away that afternoon. The town band would escort them to the station, the decorations were in honor of the day.

“What have you got in that box you are carrying so carefully?” Missy asked as Flora sat down on the steps beside them.

“Oh, nothing very much,” she evaded, and then tried so hard to change the subject that Grace and Missy knew she was trying to hide something.

“Out with it, Flora—what is it?” Grace demanded. “You’re entirely too mysterious.”

“Oh, just a cake; why on earth are you so curious?” Flora replied.

“Is it a ginger bread, by any chance?” Grace insisted.

“Yes, it is, as it happens, though what difference that can make—” Flora began, but Missy’s laughter made her stop.

“I made it for Tommy, so there,” she admitted. “He’s crazy about ginger bread, and I promised him one.”

A sudden beating of a drum, and a general stir

at the end of the street saved her from further explanation.

Dinner was over and the men were preparing to get into their waiting automobiles to ride to the station.

A big truck, donated by the Farm Implements Company, was fitted up with camp chairs for the band. They took their places and started playing, "My Country, 'Tis of Thee."

The boys who were leaving got in the first cars and the rest followed.

The procession started slowly down the hill. The station was three miles from the town, and marching was therefore out of the question.

Flora, Grace and Missy jumped on their ponies and fell in, in back of the cars.

The truck set a snail's pace, and the musicians, whether from the effect of their cramped position, or the solemnity of the occasion, droned out the strains of the National Hymn.

"This is a perfect fright," Missy declared impatiently; "why don't they play something lively; you'd think it was a funeral."

"It makes me want to cry," Grace said; "it's dreadful."

The band stopped playing but began again almost at once.

"Oh, something's got to be done," Missy exclaimed desperately as some long-drawn-out notes that tuned into "My Bonnie lies over the ocean," wafted back to them.

She spurred Cappy and galloped past the long line of cars and reined in alongside of the truck.

"Stop!" she commanded so abruptly that the leader of the band very nearly tumbled into the bass drum in his surprise.

"What's wrong?" he inquired.

"That piece you're playing," Missy told him,—"it's too sad; play something lively, like 'Tipperary.'"

The leader consulted the musicians.

"We don't know it, Miss Carey," he said apologetically. "Would 'John Brown's Body' do?"

"Goodness, no," Missy protested hurriedly. "Can you play 'Yankee Doodle'?"

"Yes, of course we can." The leader looked hurt.

"And Dixie?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Well, then, play first one and then the other, and play them fast," Missy directed and wheeled Cappy around.

Smiles appeared on the faces of the men, in place of the solemn frowns, as the jolly tune began, and they cheered Missy heartily as she galloped back to her place.

They reached the station just a few minutes before the train was due so that the farewells were hurried.

Flora gave her cake to Tom, and he thanked her with a warmth out of all proportion to the gift.

Slim stood beside Grace, the very picture of woe. Shoulders, who was in the best of spirits, drew attention to their eloquent silence.

“Cheer up, Grace,” he teased. “I’ll take care of your Slim for you and see that he wears his rubbers when it rains. Think how proud you’ll be when he’s a brave officer.”

Grace looked at Slim; there was a suspicion of tears in her eyes, but she smiled.

“I don’t have to wait until *then* to be proud of him,” she said gayly.

“There, Shoulders, now will you be good?” Slim tried to look proud and becomingly humble at the same time, and succeeded in making every one laugh.

The train pulled in and the noise and confusion increased.

Missy kissed Tom good-by, and tried hard to swallow the lump in her throat.

Then Shoulders claimed her attention.

“So long, Missy,” he said. “I’ll write, and don’t forget to send on Henri’s letters; I’ll take good care of them.”

“I’ll remember, Shoulders. Hurry up and be an officer,” Missy answered. “Don’t forget to miss me.”

“No fear,” Shoulders laughed; “I can promise you that. It’s been a great old day,” he said as he swung on the step of the last car, “and the picnic was a winner.”

“It won’t be anything to the one we’ll give you when you come back,” Missy promised as the train pulled slowly away.

They watched it and waved until it rolled out of sight in a cloud of sunlit dust.

“Well, they’re gone,” Grace said hopelessly.

“Oh, Missy, suppose they never come back?” Flora added dolefully.

“Suppose nothing of the kind, silly,” Missy replied sharply. “They will come back, every one of them, and— Oh, goodness, I’m going home,” she declared almost angrily and left them abruptly.

“I’ll stop by for the mail, Dad,” she said as

she passed her father at the other end of the platform. "I feel like taking a ride."

Mr. Carey nodded and she mounted Cappy and rode away at a gallop.

The long hard ride to the mail box helped to dispel some of the troublesome thoughts that had filled her mind, and the discovery of two letters addressed to her in a strange handwriting sent the rest flying.

One was written on blue note paper, and she opened that first.

"Dear Helen, (—it read—)

"Last winter when I used to see you off and on, and nod to you in an off-hand way if we met on the stairs or in the classrooms, I didn't know that I was in the presence of a future heroine."

Missy's brow puckered in a puzzled frown, and she turned to the signature on the last page.

"Why, it's Violet Mayfield!" she exclaimed, and read on hurriedly.

"Allan (he told you he was my cousin, didn't he?) told us all about the simply stunning way you held up those awful men and saved Shoulders'—that's such a lovely nickname—life, and we are simply crazy about it and you.

"Now here's the important part of my letter.

You know I belong to a club here, and since the war began we've been simply working ourselves to death to raise money for all sorts of charities. Now, of course, we are donating all our time to our own boys, and we are getting up a fair to raise money for comfort kits, and you've simply got to come and help. Don't you dare say no, for we are counting on you.

“Mother has written your father—”

Missy looked hastily through the rest of the mail and discovered another blue envelope.

“—And we are planning an extra booth just for you. Please, please come and be our guest of honor, Helen. We will be so proud if you only will, and I'll be simply overjoyed to have you at our house. We'll look for you the beginning of next week, so don't dare to disappoint us!

“Affectionately

“VIOLET MAYFIELD.”

Missy stared at the letter in utter bewilderment. She remembered that Violet always used the most exaggerated language, but even omitting all the “very's” and the “most's” the fact that she was invited to Fairview, Indiana, to be a guest of honor at a fair still remained, and the thought sent a warm tingle of pride through her. She opened the other letter; it was short but it

caused her even greater surprise. It was dated from one of the Southern Camps.

“Dear Missy (—it ran—):

“Vi. is writing you, so she tells me, asking you to visit her for the Fair, and I can’t resist the temptation of adding my ‘please’ to hers. You see I expect a few days’ leave about that time and it may be the last chance I have of seeing you before I go to France. Our regiment is one of the lucky ones that will probably leave among the first.

“I only tell you this because I want you to feel mean and unpatriotic if you refuse my last wish.

“You will come, won’t you?

“ALLAN.”

Missy imagined she could almost hear the inflection of his voice in that last sentence, and something queer seemed to tighten around her heart as she spurred Cappy into a gallop.

CHAPTER XVI

ON THE TRAIN

MR. CAREY looked up from the sheet of blue writing paper and nodded his head approvingly.

Mrs. Mayfield's invitation was so worded that he felt confident she was a woman who could be trusted with his daughter.

Missy was watching him expectantly.

"May I go, Dad?" she inquired eagerly.

"Why, I don't know but what it would be a good thing for you, Missy," Mr. Carey replied slowly. "You won't stay there more than a week or so, and I guess your Aunt Tab and I can worry along without you for that long."

"Oh, Daddy, I'm so glad. I'm just crazy to go. Violet is awfully nice and I know I'll have a wonderful time," and Missy danced out of the room to tell Aunt Tab.

For the rest of the week clothes were the all-absorbing topic at the ranch.

Ned complained that he couldn't put his hat down anywhere without finding a full dozen pins

sticking to it when he picked it up, and even Mr. Carey objected that the sitting-room was too full of fluffy materials and trimmings for his comfort.

The dressmaker from Preacher's Corners was called upon, and the buzz of the sewing machine, and the snip, snip of Aunt Tab's scissors could be heard at any hour of the day.

Flora and Grace took more interest in the proceedings than Missy herself.

"I can't help it," she said one day when Miss Small, the seamstress, was taking her to task for her impatience over a fitting. "I like to look nice but I hate the bother of clothes. I'm much happier in a riding skirt and a comfortable shirt waist than I am in all these tucked and ruffled fussy things."

"But, Missy, you can't wear a riding skirt at Fairview," Flora objected. She had ridden over with a pattern that morning and was spending the day. "You'll go to lots of parties and all the girls you meet will have beautiful things, most likely. Don't you honestly like new clothes?"

"Not much," Missy admitted. "I think I look awfully silly in most of these things, don't you?"

"No, I don't. I'm simply crazy over that rose-

bud dimity, and if you don't have it made up with lace I'll never forgive you," Flora replied stoutly.

"When I was a young girl," Miss Tab said mildly, "I never had more than two or three new dresses a year, and to decide about how they were to be made up was a very important matter. I remember one blue dress—it was very like that one of yours, Missy,"—she pointed to a piece of blue organdie that was lying on the table—"that I had when I was just about eighteen, I think. It was my very best, and, dear me, what a time I had getting it made just to suit me."

"Tell me about it, Aunt Tab. Do you remember what it was like?" Missy asked.

"Indeed I do," Aunt Tab's eyes sparkled with fun. "I received my first offer of marriage in it," she said, laughing gently. "The skirt was made entirely of little ruffles and the waist was a pointed bodice; there were little black bows here and there, one at my waist on one side, and another half-way down the skirt at the head of one of the ruffles on the other. Now let me think how the sleeves were. Oh, yes, I know, they were very short and puffy, and they were tied with black ribbons. I remember the ends were quite long and used to hang down."

“Must have been real sweet,” Miss Small said. She had stopped the machine to listen to the description. “And with your blue eyes I don’t wonder you got a proposal.”

“Neither do I, Aunt Tab,” Missy exclaimed impulsively. “Why couldn’t I have my blue made just like it? It’s stylish, isn’t it, Flora?”

“Of course it is, and I know it would be perfectly darling,” Flora enthused. “I can just see the dear little black bows. Maybe you’ll get a proposal in it, Missy; wouldn’t that be thrilling?”

“No, thanks,” Missy declared. “If I thought I would I’d never wear it.”

“Why, don’t you want to be proposed to?” Flora asked incredulously.

“I certainly do not.”

“But you’ll have to have one some day, you know,” she insisted.

“Why, I’d like to know?” Missy was scornful of the very idea.

“Oh, because every girl has one sometime or other.”

“Well, I won’t.”

“You can’t help yourself.”

“Oh, yes I can.”

“How?”

“I’ll run away,” Missy said emphatically, “the

very minute he starts in, and I'll run so fast he'll never catch up with me." She looked to Flora for appreciation of her plan, but Flora's thoughts were miles away, and she was wondering if she hadn't baked that ginger bread just a little bit too long.

By the first of the next week all the new dresses were finished, and Missy was ready for her trip. Miss Tab had made the blue one all by hand, and it was a marvel of dainty loveliness.

"Be sure and shake it out the minute you get there, won't you, my dear?" she asked as she and Mr. Carey stood with Missy on the station platform.

"Yes, indeed, I will, and I'll write all about the kind of a time I have the first time I wear it," Missy promised. "Do you remember whether or not I packed my tooth brush?"

"I'm sure you did, I saw you myself. Don't forget to telegraph your father when you get there, will you, dear? I'll be real worried till I know you're all right. When I was a girl we didn't travel alone as you do nowadays, and I can't get used to it."

"Don't you worry about me," Missy laughed. "I'll be safe enough. I'm used to it going back and forth to school."

“Well, I’m sure I’ll never be,” Aunt Tab sighed nervously.

“Isn’t that Mr. Price riding over the hill, Missy?” Mr. Carey called from the end of the platform. “Looks like him to me.”

“Yes, it is,” Missy replied eagerly. “I wonder what he’s doing down here. Look, he’s waving something at me.”

“Looks like a letter,” her father said.

“Hello, folks; I thought maybe I could get you,” Mr. Price announced as he stopped his horse and jumped to the ground. “I met Ned riding back with your mail a little while ago and he told me there was a letter for Missy from Henri, so as I was coming this way I thought I’d bring it along. I wanted to say good-by anyhow.”

“Oh, thanks ever so much, I’ll have it to read on the train,” Missy exclaimed. “It was awfully nice of you to take all that extra trouble. Will I have time to open it now?”

“No, there’s your train whistling for the crossing,” Mr. Carey said. “It’ll be here in a second.”

“Never mind, you’ll be back soon, or I hope you will,” Mr. Price chuckled, “but you never know what may happen, especially with all those

new clothes you have been telling us all about."

"Oh, I'll be back, never fear," Missy promised, "and I'll have such a lot to tell you."

The train, a fast express from the West that stopped only on signal, drew up to the little station. Mr. Carey showed the ticket to the conductor, and the smiling porter took Missy's bag and helped her jump up to the high step of the car.

"I'll take good care of her, sah," he promised as Missy kissed her father good-by.

The engineer whistled, impatient to be off. The conductor gave the signal, and when Missy had found her seat and looked out of the window the little station was a speck in the distance.

"You-all got a berth to yo'self," the porter said, smiling broadly, "so I'll jes stow dis yere bag on the seat; if there's anything you want jes you press that button, Missy, and I'll be right yere 'fore you can bat an eye."

Missy couldn't repress a little laugh. He had used her nickname just as Chink had done years before, and she saw that he had made up his mind that this was her first long trip.

"Thank you very much, I'm sure I'll be all right," she said to him. He disappeared at the

end of the aisle, to return in a few minutes with a pillow slip for her hat.

She thanked him again, hung up her coat, and settled back comfortably to read Henri's letter.

It was seven pages long, and the writing was small and covered both sides of the sheets. She was soon deeply engrossed in it.

Henri had been in another attack and he was less reticent about writing of it this time. His description was so vivid that Missy was carried to the very thick of the fight. She saw the barren desolation of No Man's Land, and heard the steady roar of the bursting shells. She was completely carried away from the smoothly running train and the immediate surroundings of the car she was in.

She had come to the stirring account of the taking of the enemy's first line trenches when suddenly something hit the side of her head.

It didn't hurt her, but the shock coming when it did made her scream. It was as if she had been hit by a German hand grenade.

The letter dropped to the floor and her mind came back to the present with a jerk.

"Oh, mercy!" she exclaimed, "what was it?" She looked down and found a rubber ball in her lap.

A man across the aisle smiled at her.

“Oh, you’ll get used to that,” he said, laughing. “The Little Terror is no respecter of persons when he plays ball, but I’m afraid he took you by surprise.”

“I should say he did,” Missy acknowledged ruefully. “I was reading something about the war, and it scared me almost to death.”

The man laughed and returned to his book.

Missy looked down the aisle. A small head, covered with flaming red hair, just peeked above the top of one of the seats; then after a cautious wait a face followed. It was a freckled snub-nosed little face, and gave proof in one glance that the “Little Terror” was an adequate nickname. Two small blue eyes were fastened on Missy.

She smiled and held up the ball.

“Throw it to me,” a small but decided voice demanded.

“No, you come and get it,” Missy replied.

The “Little Terror” considered for a minute and then crawled over the seat and came to her. He was a little boy of about six years old; his hands and face were very dirty, and there were traces of orange in the corners of his mouth.

“Give it here,” he said crossly.

“Oh, no, I never do anything for anybody when they ask me like that,” Missy replied quietly.

“Well, it’s my ball,” the youngster insisted, “and you just better give it to me or I’ll bite you.”

“Mercy me, why, you’re as bad as a little pony I used to have,” Missy laughed. “He always tried to bite when he couldn’t have his own way.”

“Have you a pony?”

“Yes, a lot of them.”

“How many?”

“Oh, I don’t know, lots and lots.”

“Tell me about them.” The “Little Terror” climbed up onto the seat and settled himself comfortably.

He was still there when the porter came and advised Missy to go in to dinner at the first call. She could only get rid of him by a promise to tell him more later on.

He exacted the promise to the full after dinner. By eight o’clock Missy’s imagination was exhausted.

“Don’t you ever go to bed?” she asked, laughing.

“Naw, not till I want to,” he replied. “Go on.”

“Where’s your berth?” Missy insisted. “In this car?”

“Yep, down in that room.” A very dirty finger pointed to the compartment at the end of the car.

“Is your mother there?” Missy asked.

“Sure, but she’s just talking. Go on about Cappy.”

“No, no more to-night,” Missy declared. “I’m going to bed.”

“All right, then, I’ll scream,” the Little Terror announced dispassionately. “I’ll scream awful,” and he shrieked just once to show that he was in earnest.

Missy looked at him in perplexity. She was just going to ring for the porter and ask him to make up her berth, when the compartment door opened and a badly dressed woman, who looked as though she had never been anything but very tired, walked down the aisle, caught one arm of the protesting Terror and dragged him back, in spite of his kicks and screams, to the compartment.

The screams grew louder as the sound of slaps came through the door, accompanied by a very gruff voice.

“That goes on every day; has since we left the Coast. An outrage, I call it,” the man across the aisle from Missy said.

“Then no wonder he’s so naughty,” she replied.

The man nodded.

“They’re Germans,” he said with an expressive shrug that said as plainly as words that nothing more could be expected of them.

Missy did not see the Terror until they were almost at Indianapolis on the following day. He had been playing on the observation platform most of the time, and the car had enjoyed comparative peace, but about four o’clock he came down the aisle, climbed up beside Missy and demanded a story.

“There’s no time for a story now,” she told him. “Suppose you tell me something,” she suggested.

The Little Terror eyed her suspiciously.

“What kind o’ things?” he said.

“Oh, I don’t know,” Missy parried. “Suppose you tell me what you’re going to be when you grow up, or maybe I can guess.”

“I bet you can’t. Go on and try,” he replied.

“Let me see;—soldier?”

“No.” The answer came so abruptly that Missy was surprised.

“Why not?” she inquired, but she remembered

that the man across the aisle had said they were Germans, so she hastened to change the subject.

They had reached the outskirts of Indianapolis and the porter was collecting the bags. He brushed Missy's coat and folded it carefully.

"Gwan, chile, afore I'se paddle yer," he said to the Little Terror. "My, I'se be glad when I see's de last of yer," he added with a sigh of anticipated relief.

The Little Terror promptly stuck out his tongue.

"Know what?" he said as the porter carried Missy's bag to the vestibule, "we might just as well get off here, only we're going on to the next station 'cause my father says it's safer. I'm glad too, 'cause we're going to have a long ride in an automobile," he added gleefully.

"We're going to a place where there's lots of trees and grass, and Mama says maybe we'll stay—" but the rest of the story was cut short, for the train had entered the station shed, and Missy saw Allan Webb and Violet standing on the platform.

CHAPTER XVII

A RENEWED ACQUAINTANCE

MISSY was the first one off the train as it stopped at the station, and she stepped right into the arms of the excited Violet.

“Helen, I am so glad to see you, you wonderful girl,” Violet enthused. “Why, I’m so proud I don’t know what to do. I’d just simply been broken hearted if you hadn’t come, the Fair is—”

“Oh, now Vi. Just stop for half a second and give me a chance,” Allan begged, as he shook Missy’s hand. “I’m just as glad to see Missy as you are and I insist upon telling her so.”

“It’s awfully nice to be here and I’m so glad to see you both,” Missy said. She was feeling very shy and confused under the torrent of Violet’s greetings.

“Are you, really? It’s just dear of you to say so,” Violet continued, “and I’m simply dying to hear all about that thrilling hold-up from your very own lips.”

“Well, let’s choose a better place than this,” Allan suggested. He picked up Missy’s bag and started down the platform. A steady banging on one of the windows of the car above his head made him look up.

“Who’s your friend, Missy?” he inquired. “He seems to be trying to attract your attention.”

“Oh, that’s the Little Terror,” Missy explained as she blew a kiss to the eager freckled face that was nodding to her. “I’m not sorry to part with him; he was rather a handful.”

“Looks like it,” Allan agreed. “Come this way; we have to take another train, you know.”

He walked down the length of the station, through a gate, and helped them into another train.

The trip to Fairview took a couple of hours, and they did not reach the Mayfields’ home until nearly seven o’clock.

Missy met Violet’s father and mother in the hall, and had just time to say, “How do you do,” and decide that they were both very nice, before Violet hurried her away to her room.

At dinner, under the quiet natural charm of Mrs. Mayfield, she lost a little of the shyness that

Violet's enthusiastic praise had caused, but she was glad when time came to go to bed. She was a little tired from her trip and just a little homesick.

The next morning Violet took her to the big town hall where they were getting ready for the Fair, and introduced her to all of her friends.

They greeted her almost as warmly as Violet had done, and Missy, her cheeks very red from embarrassment, wished secretly that she had never seen Thud Sheldon or discovered his plot, and above all that she had never accepted Violet's invitation.

"Really it wasn't nearly as exciting as you think it was," she said to Marjorie Perkins, a tall blonde girl with dreamy blue eyes.

"Things just happened and I did everything mechanically. I'm sure if I had had to make up my mind, or had time to decide about it I would have been scared to death."

"Didn't it make you thrill to know that you had done something for your country?" Marjorie inquired earnestly.

Missy laughed.

"Goodness, no," she protested, "I was sort of mad at Thud, of course, but, oh, well, it wasn't so much that I did when you really think about it.

I'd love dearly to get a chance to do something really big, but of course, I don't suppose I ever will." Marjorie looked at her in surprise, and the talk turned to other subjects,

"What are you going to do for us at the Fair, my dear?" Mrs. Mayfield asked when they were at luncheon. "We hoped you might have an original idea."

"You might put her in a tent and exhibit her as the Champion Lady Hold-up," Allan suggested. "I'm sure it would be worth at least fifty cents a ticket."

"Can you do anything special?" Violet inquired. "I mean besides shoot and ride a horse."

Missy was nonplussed.

"Why, no, I don't really think I can," she stammered.

"I'll bet you can lasso," Allan declared. "Can't you?"

"Oh, of course, but you don't want me to go around the Fair roping the visitors, do you?" Missy laughed.

"It might not be a bad idea," Mrs. Mayfield said seriously.

"I'll think about it and maybe I'll get an inspiration."

“What are you children going to do this afternoon?”

“I’ve got to go to a committee meeting,” Violet said, “so Allan has to amuse Helen.”

“Well, it’s about time I was allowed that privilege,” Allan laughed. “Missy’s really my friend, you know, and I don’t want you to forget it.”

“What will you do? It’s too hot for tennis.”

“And I don’t play anyway,” Missy confessed.

“We’ll go for a ride,” Allan said. “I want Missy to see that even if I am a tenderfoot with horses I am not quite so helpless when it comes to driving a car.”

“I wish you wouldn’t keep reminding me that I called you a tenderfoot,” Missy said as they started for their ride a little later. “I took it all back the next day when you got the best of Jinx, and I think you’re mean.”

Allan looked at her and smiled.

“Then I won’t say it again,” he promised gently. He turned out of peaceful Main Street and headed for the country.

“You haven’t told me yet what you think of my car,” he said.

“It’s a perfect beauty. I never saw anything so long and powerful looking, and I like the nice

gray color it's painted," Missy replied enthusiastically. "How fast can it go?"

"Do you want to see?"

"Yes." Missy's eyes danced with excitement.

"Then hang on," Allan warned her as he gradually quickened the speed of the car until it seemed as though they were almost flying.

"How was that?" he demanded as he slowed up for a crossing.

"It was great! I never knew a car could go so fast," Missy exclaimed. "If Tim gets ours up to thirty-five he thinks he's breaking all records."

"Shall we try it again?"

"No, not right away, I'd rather talk,"—Missy smiled, and Allan slowed the car to a snail's pace.

"Tell me about camp," she asked. "I'm crazy to know what it's like now that Tommy is there, and are you really going to France soon?"

"I hope so, and the signs do sort of point that way, but of course, we really don't know anything for sure."

"Oh dear, I sort of hate to think of it. I keep remembering what Henri said in one of his letters. 'In an attack some must be left behind,'

and you know all the Germans in the world aren't worth one American. I do wish we'd hurry up and just give them a good sound licking," she finished angrily.

"Well, give us time," Allan said, "we'll do it yet and we'll make a thorough job of it. Honestly, Missy, I just can't wait to get there."

"But, why? You may get killed," Missy said.

"What if I do? Missy, would you be sorry?"

The question came so abruptly that Missy blushed.

"Why of course I would; what a silly question to ask," she answered.

Allan drove on for a little while in silence. His officer's uniform and cap made him look older and a little bit handsomer, Missy decided as she watched him out of the corner of her eye.

"Do you know," she said finally, "in spite of all the soldiers I've seen in the last couple of days—there were a lot of them on the train coming, and you remember how many we saw in the station—I just can't believe that we are at war. Now if I could just see some marching, or a sentry on duty, I might realize it."

"Do you want to realize it?" Allan inquired as he slowed down the car.

“Of course I do.”

“All right, keep your eyes open.”

He turned around and took a road that they had passed a little way back.

It led through corn fields and now and again they passed an old farm house or a group of barns. They struck the railway tracks and followed them for several miles.

“Do you see that bridge?” Allan inquired as they came to a river, and the road turned abruptly to the right.

“Yes, and, oh, Allan, do look, there’s a soldier walking up and down! Isn’t that exciting!”

“He’s guarding the bridge against German spies,” Allan explained. “Now do you realize we’re at war?”

“Yes, I believe I do,” Missy said seriously.

The soldier saw them and waved. Allan honked his horn and Missy waved back.

“He must be awfully lonely up there all alone,” she said.

“Oh, he’s not on long at a stretch. Hello, there goes a tire.”

“Not a blow-out?” Missy asked.

“Sounds like it.” Allan stopped the car.

“Yes, it’s this back tire. Oh, well, never mind, I’ll drive down under that tree by the river where

it's shady and you can enjoy the sight of your sentinel while I change the shoe."

"Maybe I can help; I have, you know," Missy said as she got out of the car and watched Allan select the necessary tools.

The bridge and the soldier were the only things in sight. The road was through a lonely bit of country and there was not a house in view, so that it was a surprise to Missy to see a child coming toward them across the field.

"Why, it's the Little Terror!" she exclaimed as she recognized her red-haired, freckled-faced traveling companion.

"What are you doing here?" she asked as he ran to her.

"Looking round," he replied. "Anyway my papa is, I'm chasing a big butterfly. Have you seen him anywhere around here?"

"No, I'm sorry, but I haven't," Missy laughed. "Aren't you surprised to see me?"

"Nope, I knew you lived here; we do too now, we came back in a big automobile, bigger'n yours. Oh, there he is!" he exclaimed as a big butterfly flew lazily by, and he was off in pursuit.

"That child seems to haunt me," Missy said, "though, thank goodness, I can get away from him to-day; I couldn't in the train."

“Jump in, I’ll save you from him,” Allan laughed as he put back the tools in the box and opened the door of the car.

“I’d like always to be around to rescue you from unpleasant things, Missy. Would you like to have me?”

Missy recognized the soft inflection in his voice that had come to her so clearly as she read his letter on her Western plains, and the memory of it obliterated the red head of the Little Terror.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE WARNING

“**W**HY, that’s a letter from Tommy,” Missy said eagerly as she picked up an envelope that she found at her place at breakfast the next morning.

“Read it, dear,” Mrs. Mayfield smiled. “I know you’re anxious to know what he has to say, and we’ll excuse you.”

Missy tore open the envelope. It was a short letter written in Tom’s brief way.

“Why, how exciting!” she exclaimed when she had finished reading it. “He says that he and Shoulders are going to a camp on Long Island, as part of the ‘Rainbow Division.’ What’s that, Allan?”

“Why, they’ve chosen a regiment from every State in the Union,” Allan explained, “and they are going to train them at Camp Mills. I think he’s lucky to be ordered there; I hear it’s going to be a wonderful camp. When does he leave?”

“He says he’s not sure, but if he can find out

if they stop anywhere near here he's going to send me a telegram."

"Oh, won't it be exciting if they do!" Violet exclaimed. "We could be there if it were only for a minute. I'm crazy to meet your brother, Helen. Allan says he's simply splendid, and as for Shoulders, well, I know I'd be simply wild over him."

"Do you know, I thought that was his last name when Allan first talked about him, and one day I called him Mr. Shoulders; you should have heard Captain Forrest and Allan laugh, but it's such a queer nickname. Where did he get it?"

"Chink gave it to him," Missy explained, "the same as he gave me mine. The first time he ever saw him he said, 'Him—allee Shoulders,' and of course the name stuck. It does suit him, too, doesn't it, Allan?"

"Yes, he's got the broadest shoulders I ever saw," Allan admitted, but he made haste to change the subject.

Missy's affection for the big cow puncher always made him unreasonably angry.

It was the day before the Fair and Violet took Missy to the hall and kept her there all day. They worked hard, for the final decorations were still unfinished.

Mrs. Mayfield had thought of a novel scheme for Missy, but apart from asking her if she was very accurate with the lasso she refused to go into details, and when Missy admitted that she was she would not tell them another thing.

The idea of the Fair was to have all the nations of the Allies represented.

Mrs. Mayfield had charge of the English booth, where she was going to sell all kinds of knitted articles and the latest war books.

Violet, with several of the other girls, was going to wear the dress and cap of an Alsatian peasant and sell flowers.

She tried on her costume that evening when they got home.

"It's mighty pretty," Missy said as she finished lacing up the bodice. "I think it would be fun to go around dressed like that all the time, don't you?"

"Oh, it would be perfectly adorable!" Violet agreed. "I'd love it, you'd always have the feeling that you were dressed up to be in a play, and you'd always be waiting for the curtain to go up, though I don't suppose the people in Alsace feel that way, do you?"

Missy couldn't repress a smile. "No, I suppose they are used to it," she said.

“What are you going to wear to-night?” Violet rattled on. “You know some of my friends are coming in to meet you and we’ll probably kick up the rugs and dance.”

“Why, I thought I’d wear that blue dress,” Missy hesitated.

“The one with the ruffles?” Violet inquired. “Don’t you dare, you’ve got to save that for to-morrow night. I’m simply mad about it. Wear the white one with the pink rose-buds to-night, and, oh, Missy, let me fix your hair for you. I know a perfectly stunning way that would be so becoming. Here, sit down.”

Missy sank onto the long bench before her dressing table without protest. All of the girls she had met that day wore their hair up and she felt very young with hers down her back.

Violet’s deft little fingers patted and pulled, and when she had finished the result almost surprised Missy herself. It was a far more successful attempt than her own had been, and it felt as if it were up to stay.

At eight o’clock the guests began to arrive. Violet greeted them and introduced Missy with an exaggerated description of her as a heroine.

Poor Missy! She stammered and blushed and was altogether unhappy, and to make it worse

Allan stood by and seemed to enjoy her confusion. But the old adage that a thing must get worse before it gets better proved true, for just as she was most miserable Violet brought up Malcolm White. He was a U. S. Marine, home, like Allan, on leave, and he had spent a summer in Wyoming and knew Grace Hollis.

Missy was so glad to be able to step down from the lofty pedestal that Violet had put her on and talk to some one about the things she really knew and loved, that she let Malcolm lead her over to the window seat and talk to her while the others danced three dances.

It was not until the guests had gone and Violet was teasing her as they got ready for bed that she realized how much of the evening she had devoted to him.

"Allan was so cross he wouldn't even be nice to anybody," Violet declared. "I've never seen him in such a rage."

"Allan! why what made him cross?" Missy inquired innocently.

"You did, because you talked to Malcolm all the time."

"But what difference could that make to Allan?"

"All the difference in the world, silly; Allan's

simply crazy about you," Violet answered, yawning as she turned out the light, and Missy tried to go to sleep, but this entirely new idea kept singing in her ears.

The first thing that Mrs. Mayfield asked the next morning was:

"Missy, have you a riding skirt with you?"

"Why, yes, in the bottom of my trunk," Missy replied, though she had made a little vow, when she realized the scarcity of horses in Fairview, never to admit that she had brought one with her.

"Good, then put it in a suitcase with a flannel shirt and colored handkerchief. Vi can give you a red sailor tie, and take them over to the Hall. Now, don't ask questions," she laughed as she saw Missy's look of surprise.

"Where's Allan?" Violet inquired. "Surely he's not still in bed?"

"Indeed he is not," her mother replied. "He's gone to town."

"Mercy! The plot thickens," Mr. Mayfield laughed from behind his morning paper.

The plan remained a mystery all day and it was not until eight o'clock that evening that Mrs. Mayfield beckoned Missy to her and led her to the dressing-room.

The hall was transformed into a splendid bower of flags.

The tricolor floated above the French booth where little girls in quaint costumes sold dainty candies.

The black of the Belgian flag lent a somber dignity to the corner set apart for contributions for little Belgian children.

The knitting table was doing a steady business under the protection of John Bull.

The room was filled with people, but they cleared a space for Missy as she returned in her riding skirt, carrying a coil of rope in one hand. Mrs. Mayfield led her to the center of the room directly under the Stars and Stripes.

"Miss Carey will lasso anything or anybody in this room for twenty-five cents," she announced, laughing, "and she promises not to hurt anybody's hat, or to knock off your glasses when she's doing it."

The announcement received hearty applause, and after a few minutes of hesitation people began coming up to her.

"Do you think you could rope that chair for me, my dear?" an old gentleman inquired with a twinkle in his eye.

Missy smiled at him and nodded, then she uncoiled her rope, encircled the chair easily and dragged it across the floor.

After that she was kept busy for the rest of the evening. It became quite a game to single out a friend, lure him in the center of the room where Missy's all-encircling rope would pin his arms to his side and hold him until he would promise to buy flowers or candy at the command of his captor, and when toward the end of the evening dancing began, the men chose their partners, dropped the money into the basket that Allan was holding, and Missy roped the girls and delivered them bound to their purchasers.

"Aunt Peg, I think Missy's done enough," Allan objected at the end of the fifth dance. "I know she's tired and anyway I want to dance with her," he ended lamely.

Mrs. Mayfield looked at Missy and then at the basket heaped high with silver.

"I think she deserves a rest," she said. "Go and change your dress, dear, and come back and dance."

"My arm is a little tired," Missy admitted, "but it's been loads of fun."

The music started, and before Missy knew it

Allan was dancing her down the floor in a lively one-step.

After it was over she hurried to the dressing-room to change into her blue dress. The air of the hall was hot, and the exertion of throwing the lariat had made her a little tired and dizzy. She opened the window of the dressing-room and took deep grateful breaths of the cool night air.

It was a bright starlit night, and the tiny crescent of the new moon just showed above the tree tops.

Missy was thinking how different the scene before her was to the solitude to which she was accustomed, when a squeaky voice from below the window startled her out of her reverie.

“Hello, you, I’ve been looking through the window at you.”

Missy looked down and could not help laughing as she saw again the fiery hair of the Little Terror.

“Well, for goodness’ sake, where did you come from?” she asked as she sat down on the window sill and pulled him through the window beside her.

“Oh, I runned away; my papa’s gone somewhere and my mama’s crying over there.” He

pointed a pudgy finger in the general direction of the Main Street of the village.

“What’s that?” he demanded, looking at the lasso.

Missy picked it up and explained.

“Ah, that’s nothing. I know about something more exciting than that,” he added proudly. “I’ll tell you if you give me an ice cream cone.”

“All right, I’ll give you one,” Missy promised good-naturedly.

“What do you know?” She asked the question idly and was not at all prepared for the amazing story that tumbled from the small red lips of the Little Terror.

“Guess what?” he said gleefully. “Know where I seen you the other day? Well, my papa’s going there and he’s going to cut off a little piece of the iron track and give it to me to play with, cause I’m a German, see, and my papa says nothing’s too good for me. Maybe he’ll have to punch that old soldier that’s there, and then when the train all full of soldiers comes along, bang they’ll all fall into the river, and my pop says—”

But Missy did not wait to hear more. From the confused jingle of words she understood one clear fact. The bridge was in danger.

She rolled the astonished child unceremoniously

out of the window and dashed back to the hall.

Allan was waiting for her beside the French booth. She caught his arm tightly.

“Come quickly, something awful has happened!” she gasped.

Allan saw the look of horror on her white face and followed her quickly to the door.

CHAPTER XIX

THE RESCUE

“**Y**OUR car, quickly!” she directed as they reached the sidewalk. “Drive to the bridge we went to the other day as fast as you can. I’ll explain.”

“Where’s my ice cream?” an angry voice demanded, but Missy hardly heard it. It was not until she was in the car, and going at a terrific speed that she realized that she was holding tight to her lasso rope.

When they reached the open road Allan turned a little from the wheel.

“What’s up?” he asked shortly.

“Oh, Allan, I don’t know for sure,” Missy answered breathlessly, “but that terrible child told me some stuff about his father cutting a piece of the railroad ties and punching the sentry. He’s a German, you know, but perhaps it was all some make-believe.

“Well, we won’t take any chances,” Allan replied, and made his car fly along the deserted road.

They were going so fast that conversation was impossible. Allan kept his eyes fastened on the road, and Missy tried to collect her thoughts to meet the danger ahead.

From the lights and laughter of the Fair she was suddenly transported to a stretch of flat country, tearing along beside Allan to—she knew not what—perhaps the horrible sight of a wreck. Then the memory of Tom's letter flashed through her mind like a scorching flame. The train of soldiers that the Little Terror had predicted so gleefully would go "bang into the river" was a troop train, and Missy never doubted that it was the one that was carrying Tom and Shoulders east. She tried to ease her fears by cold sensible reasoning, but her heart was thumping, and her brain was filled with a sickening dread.

"Allan," she whispered once, "Tommy and Shoulders!"

Allan gave a startled exclamation and urged the powerful car on to even greater speed. As they came to the railroad track he slowed down.

"We're in time anyway," he said with relief. "Keep up your nerve, Missy; maybe it's nothing at all." He switched off his powerful headlights and drove the car cautiously to the river bank and stopped.

Everything was quiet. The bridge loomed black and sinister against the brilliant star-lit sky. Allan got out of the car.

"There's a gun under that seat, Missy," he whispered, "I'll leave it for you."

"Where are you going?" Missy demanded, but her voice was calm.

"Oh, just to have a look. I'll climb up that bank and if everything's all right I'll call to you."

"Take the gun; I won't need it," Missy said.

"No, I won't; you keep it, and if you want me, fire."

Allan walked quickly into the darkness. Missy watched him until he was out of sight, and settled down to wait. Her ears were trained to hear the slightest sound; a rustle of the bushes, the rolling of some loose dirt came to her, followed by a silence for three terrifying minutes. Then a shot, a sharp cry and a flash as if a fuse had been blown out.

Missy's first thought was that Allan had no gun, and she nearly fainted with fear. For a second her mind was numbed, then it cleared and she could think clearly and quickly.

She switched on the big search light of the car and turned it full on the bridge. It was an effort to make herself look, but she did. Three

indistinct forms were silhouetted against the shadow of the background of trees. With a shudder she saw that one of them was a crumpled heap of khaki; the other two were locked in each other's arms, fighting desperately. It was impossible to distinguish which of the three was Allan. As she watched the two men moved to the edge of the bridge, there was a second of terrifying indecision, and then a splash as their bodies struck the water below.

Missy never knew how she got to the edge of the river, but she was there a minute after the splash.

"Allan!" she called desperately. A head appeared above the surface of the water.

"The bridge is wrecked, Missy; you've got to stop the train. Don't wait for me, go now; there isn't a second to spare," a voice weak and barely audible, but unmistakably Allan's, came to her.

It was a momentous choice, and Missy wavered in her decision, then the greater duty triumphed and she hurried back to the car.

She longed for a horse as she released the brakes and tried to concentrate on the starting of it. She felt clumsy and so slow. At last it jumped forward with a sudden bound; she headed it back along the track towards the coming train.

Tim's patient explanation and only half-serious lessons of the past were being called upon to their uttermost, but the car was going and going fast and that was the main thing.

She passed the road that led back to the village, and a feeling of desolation and loneliness came over her. The country stretched out in a desert of corn fields, and there was no sign of a human habitation in sight.

Missy tried to devise some plan. She hoped every minute that she would come to a station. At last a tiny, faint pin point of light showed far down the track; her heart warmed at the sight, only to turn cold with fear at the next instant as the distant rumble of a train reached her.

She jammed on the brakes and looked frantically around her. A white mile post gleamed ghost-like from the other side of the track. She looked at it hard; she was trying to bring her mind to focus on the train.

The noise of the train grew nearer; she watched it pass the green light and come steadily on. It was in full sight; in a minute it would be past her. She saw the bold, unblinking headlight of the great locomotive, and something in her head clicked.

She pressed her knee on the button of the

horn that was fastened to the side of the car and felt for her lasso; it was in the seat beside her.

The horn emitted a steady shriek that rose above the rumble of the oncoming train, then it stopped suddenly and Missy stood up on her seat. Just as the big train was almost abreast of her she sent the lasso hurtling through the air and pulled it taut as it encircled the mile post across the track. Then she braced herself against the side of the car for the shock. As the locomotive struck the rope, the end that she was holding was jerked out of her hands and caught in the engine. The engineer felt a slight jar and a piece of wood crashed through the window beside him; it was part of the mile post.

He jammed on the brakes and brought the train to a sudden stop farther on.

He jumped to the ground and raced back along the track and almost stumbled over a limp little body in a blue dress that lay huddled in a heap by the side of a big gray automobile.

CHAPTER XX

MISSY MAKES A PROMISE

WHEN Missy opened her eyes an hour later Allan was kneeling beside her, and her head was pressed against the side of his damp coat.

“Missy, Missy, my darling, speak to me,” he begged softly.

Missy tried to smile, but a blinding pain in her right shoulder made her close her eyes and she lost consciousness before she could answer him.

In a far-off sort of way she knew that some one was trying to make her drink something. Whatever it was it had a soothing effect on her pain. She opened her eyes again; a hazy memory of what had happened was struggling with the dancing lights before her eyes.

The roadside seemed filled with soldiers. She wondered vaguely if she was somewhere in France on a battlefield. She thought she heard Tom’s voice, but she wasn’t sure. Then a confusion of things crowded into her mind, and for a little while she struggled with the idea that some

one was crying to her from the middle of a swiftly flowing river.

“Allan,” she cried, and made a desperate effort to get up.

“Here I am, dear, what is it? Oh, Missy, are you suffering awfully, poor wonderful, brave little girl?”

Things began to take some sort of shape as she regained full consciousness.

“Did I hear Tom’s voice?” she asked wonderingly.

“Yes, you did, dear,” a big voice answered, and she found herself looking into Tom’s frightened face.

“Where’s Shoulders?” she whispered.

“Right here beside you.” A heavy rough hand found hers and squeezed it.

“Then nobody got hurt, did they?” she inquired, “but why am I here?”

“We don’t know, Missy, can you remember?” Tom asked.

Missy tried to think.

“The train was coming,” she said slowly, “and I had to stop it because the red-headed child’s papa said he was a German and—oh, dear, that’s not it.”

“Don’t try to remember, honey, just be still.”

Shoulders' voice sounded shaky, and Missy wondered why he had been crying.

"No, I want to tell it," she insisted feverishly. "You see the train was coming and I had to stop it and I couldn't reach the lights in time, so I roped that post over there and then I sort of forgot what happened. I hung on tight to the other end; I had to because the engineer wouldn't stop when I pushed the horn. Allan, did the Little Terror's father punch the soldier on the bridge?"

"She's getting feverish and she mustn't talk any more," a very stern voice said, and Missy felt a cool hand on her forehead, something nice trickled down her throat. After that she was only half-conscious of what happened.

She heard a loud noise and a lot of talking, and then a voice that sounded like Allan's said, "Yes, sir, a whole rail was gone, sir; he did it with an electric detonator, I think. Must have taken the sentry by surprise, for he killed him at once, sir."

"Were you without a gun?" a very deep voice inquired.

"Yes, sir, but I ducked his shot and grappled with him. We both fell into the water, you know, and I think he's still there."

"Then the girl came on alone to flag the train?"

“Yes, sir.”

“Most remarkable. I never heard anything like it. Do you suppose she had an idea she could lasso an engine?”

“I don’t know, sir, but she did stop the train.”

“Yes, yes, she did, and you tell me her brother was on it; most remarkable story I ever heard.” The questioner blew his nose loudly, and the conversation stopped.

Then she felt herself being lifted gently, as some one said, “The tracks reported fixed, sir; shall we go on?”

Then Tom and Shoulders both kissed her and said a lot of things she couldn’t understand, and after a little wait she felt herself moving slowly away.

The ruts in the road made the pain in her shoulder worse and she groaned. Some one gave her something to drink and she went to sleep.

“I wish you’d stop looking at me,” she said late the next morning. She was in bed in her room at the Mayfield house and a nurse in a white cap was sitting beside her.

“You don’t think I see you, but I do,” she added fretfully.

“Oh, you’re awake, are you?” a cheerful voice replied. “Well, that’s good. How about a lit-

tle hot broth or something to eat; you're hungry, aren't you?"

"Yes, I guess I am," Missy admitted. "Did I dream about all that last night?"

"Look at that bandage and you'll see for yourself," she said, "how do you feel?"

"Kind of wobbly," Missy replied. "I think I'd like that soup."

After she drank a cup of hot broth she began to feel better.

The doctor came in later, looked at her, and nodded approvingly.

"Rest for to-day," he insisted when she wanted to ask questions, "and if you are better to-morrow I'll let you have some company."

So Missy rested and tried not to worry too much when the pain in her shoulder grew worse toward night.

"There, am I better?" she demanded the next morning when the doctor took her hand, "and can I ask just one question?"

"Yes, if it isn't a very long one," the doctor agreed.

"Then how is Allan?" Missy asked eagerly.

"Well, I declare; he's very well. That is, none the worse for his ducking, but he's in danger of losing his mind, he says, unless he sees you."

“Oh, then, please let him come,” Missy begged. “I’ll be good, really I will, and it will make me lots better; you see if it doesn’t.”

The doctor nodded his head wisely.

“We’ll see,” he said. “There are two other people equally anxious to talk to you.”

“Tommy and Shoulders,” Missy guessed.

“No, they are on their way east. The bridge was fixed last night, and you know war is a stern master.”

Missy looked disappointed. “I suppose so, anyway I did see them last night, didn’t I?” she asked. “But tell me who the other two are?” she added.

“Well, one is a colonel of the United States Army; he wants to tell you how brave you are, and ask you one or two questions. Do you feel like seeing him?”

“Yes, of course I do,” Missy replied. “Who’s the other?”

“Your father.”

“Dad here! Oh, let me see him this minute!” Missy cried excitedly, and the doctor raised a warning finger.

“Not if you’re going to get so excited,” he said.

Missy subsided, and in a few minutes the door opened and the colonel entered.

He was an elderly man with white hair and an erect and soldierly bearing.

“The doctor says I may stay with you for just five minutes, Miss Carey,” he said, sitting down in the chair that the nurse had placed for him, “and how can I thank you in that short time for your splendid courage? I promised not to excite you, so that I can’t tell you what a very wonderful thing you did.”

Missy smiled happily.

“Why, I just did what I had to do,” she replied. “I suppose I could have thought of something better, but I just did the first thing that came into my mind. Please don’t thank me. Gracious, my own brother was on the train, you know, so I simply had to save him.”

The colonel shook his head.

“I suppose being a heroine for the second time makes you feel quite at home,” he said, his eyes twinkling, “so I won’t say any more, except to thank you in the name of our Government for your courage and pluck.”

When he saw tears shining in Missy’s gray eyes, he hastened to change the subject and asked her to tell him all that she could about the Little Terror.

When the five minutes were up he left her with a grave salute, and the nurse ushered in Mr. Carey.

“Daddy!” Missy snuggled into her father’s warm embrace, and cried for joy. Neither of them said very much, for Mr. Carey’s voice broke every time he tried to speak, and Missy had nothing to say, but she did ask when she could go home.

“Just as soon as you are a little better,” her father told her, “and oh, Missy, my dear little girl, don’t ever go away again,” he added brokenly.

It was not until after dinner that Allan came. He entered on tiptoe and hesitated awkwardly at the foot of the lounge on which she was lying.

“Missy, how are you?” he asked gently.

“Hello, Allan, I’m fine,” Missy replied. She had been longing to see him all day, but now that he was there she was suddenly confused.

“You—you didn’t catch cold from your ducking, did you?” she asked prosaically.

Allan looked at her and they both laughed.

“Missy, you darling you!” he exclaimed, dropping to his knees beside her. “I thought they weren’t going to let me see you before I left.”

Missy caught her breath in a little gasp.

“Left! Allan, you aren’t going away?” she asked.

“Yes, dear, I am, to-night, and we sail for France next week. It must be, you know, but oh, Missy, if I only knew that when I came back you —” he hesitated and looked at her beseechingly.

Missy smiled back at him.

“I’ll be waiting for you, dear,” she promised softly.

Then as he kissed her she added happily, “And to think I had on the blue dress! But I couldn’t run away when you called me darling, and, any way, that wasn’t exactly a proposal, was it?”

CHAPTER XXI

CONCLUSION

“**I**’LL ride in for the mail, Chink, but don’t tell Aunt Tab,” Missy said as she left her chair by the window and tiptoed out of the room.

“Missy’s arm velly sick,” Chink protested.

“No, it’s not, it’s almost well, and Cappy will walk if I tell him to,” Missy assured him, “and if I stay in the house another day I’ll go crazy.”

She called Ned and after a good deal of coaxing she persuaded him to harness Cappy for her.

Once in the saddle with the reins caught loosely in her still bandaged hand she gave a deep sigh of content.

The broad plains rolled invitingly before her, and the big range of mountains seemed to welcome her home.

“It’s my country, Cappy,” she said aloud to the pony, “and I’ve done my bit so that I can claim it as mine, but there’s lots more to be done, old man, and we’re not going to sit back and let some one else do it.”

The relief of expressing her innermost feelings made her spur Cappy into a lope and the mail box was soon reached.

“There’s a letter from Henri,” she exclaimed as she saw the corner of the familiar gray paper.

“Walk slowly, old fellow, so that I can read it.” She opened the envelope with little trouble, for her fingers were growing strong again as her broken shoulder got better, and this is what she read:

“A Base Hospital.
“Somewhere in Belgium.

“*My dear little Marraine,*

“I can write but a few words; I am badly wounded, but in spite of my pain my heart sings. I have found again my little sister Marieken of whom I write to you so often. She is well and oh, my little Marraine, how can I tell you; she has done so great a thing for our beloved Belgium. I want that you should know of it, and some day soon I will tell you. It is a book of glowing deeds, that story of my little sister. La petite Brave, Marieken De Bruin!

“Your happy soldier,

HENRI.”

Missy gazed for a long time over the plains, thinking of the story of the little Belgian.

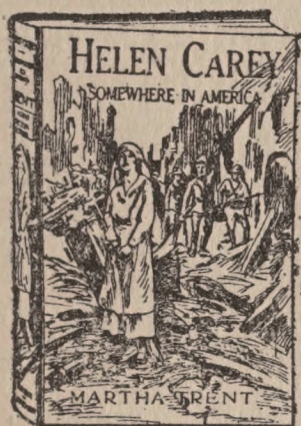
“I wonder if I will ever see her,” she said, and then because speculating on the way of destiny is useless, and because the sun was well down in the west, she spurred Cappy and started home to the ranch.

THE END

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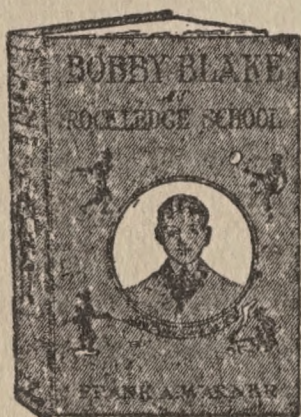
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